QL
690.S4
S45
Birds

Scottish Bird News

No 83 Mar. 2007

Montrose Basin LNR

Annual Goose Breakfast event *Neil Mitchell*

The Reserve

Montrose Basin is an enclosed tidal estuary located on the Angus coastline midway between Aberdeen & Dundee into which the River South Esk flows. Extensive mudflats and the nature of the tides provide a haven for wintering wildfowl and waders. The surrounding farmland, reed beds and salt marsh are important for a variety of breeding species. The spectacle of skeins of Pink-footed Geese over the Montrose skyline is so much part of winter here that it has become an icon of the town. Inhabitants of Montrose are all familiar with the 'wink wink' call as they pass overhead.

The Local Nature Reserve (LNR) covers and area of 1024ha, the inter-tidal zone being approximately 750ha in extent, spanning 2.5km from North to South and 3km East to West. The basin was declared a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) by the Nature Conservancy in 1974. The tidal mud flats are mostly in the ownership of the Scottish Wildlife Trust who also run a Visitor Centre with viewing facilities on the southern shore. Farmland to the north is part of the House of Dun estate owned by The National Trust for Scotland. The site is designated as a Local Nature Reserve, managed by the Scottish Wildlife Trust in partnership with Angus Council, The National Trust for Scotland and SNH.

The intertidal fauna is a critical component in maintaining the reserve's significance for waders and wildfowling. High densities of *Hydrobia* snails, eel grass (*Zostera sp.*) and extensive mussel beds support wildfowl populations. The invertebrate communities beneath the tidal mud provide rich feeding for winter wader assemblages. The reserve currently supports Nationally Important numbers of Shelduck, Wigeon, Eider, Mute Swans and Knot (a species previously in numbers of international importance), whilst Redshank and Pink-footed Geese

Wader roost *Eric McCabe*

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

winter in internationally important numbers. The reserve's average annual waterbird population is 47,227 (source - Waterbirds in the UK 2004/5).

Designations

Alongside the site's SSSI and LNR designations, Montrose Basin is internationally recognised through designations as a Special Protection Area (SPA) under article 4 of the European Communities Directive on the Conservation of Birds and as a Ramsar site under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat. The site qualifies by regularly supporting in winter more than 20,000 waterfowl and also internationally important numbers of Icelandic Pink-footed Geese and Redshank.

Site history

Montrose Basin is slightly unusual in that the importance and need for management to conserve the site's interest was first recognised by local wildfowlers in the 1960s and is not attributed to 'conventional' conservationists. Wildfowlers have long been entwined within the human history of the Basin. As early as 1327, Robert the Bruce installed a falconer at what became Fullerton (Fowler-ton) just south of the western end of the basin, to supply birds for the King's table in Forfar. A local newspaper dated 19th Feb 1864, stated 'It is a notorious fact that, from time immemorial, the inhabitants of Montrose have used and exercised the right of shooting wildfowl on the Montrose Basin.' In the 1960s, free uncontrolled wildfowling presented an unsustainable situation. As wildfowl numbers on the basin declined, calls for controls increased. In 1981, establishment of the Local Nature Reserve gave Angus Council control over activities on the reserve and a system of controlled wildfowling was introduced.

The reserve is now managed by the Scottish Wildlife Trust on behalf of Angus Council, overseen by a management committee of interested bodies, which also includes a representative from BASC (British Association for Conservation & Shooting). A far cry from the days of indiscriminate massacring of wildfowl on the basin, the management has worked to achieve a balance between the wildfowler and the conservationist. With a sanctuary area, strict permit system and bag limit in place, wardened by Angus Council and Scottish Wildlife Trust Rangers, it seems that a broadly acceptable balance has been reached.

Species

The **Pink-footed Geese** are by far the most numerous visitors, numbers increasing from late September onwards and peaking during November at anywhere between 18,000 and 40,000. Numbers then decrease as the geese move to feeding grounds in the south, levelling at between 3,000 – 5,000 in January and February. Wet weather resulting in late harvests and unploughed stubbles can leave enough food to tempt geese to stay and build up in numbers but in some years as in 2006/7 the numbers do not build to this peak. The reserve is used extensively as a roost site, geese generally leaving at dawn for feeding grounds on surrounding fields. The main roost site is to the east of the basin near the Railway Station. This is designated as a sanctuary zone and no wildfowling is permitted in this half of the basin.

The **Eider** population has increased steadily since the1960s. Whereas counts once peaked at 200-300, nowadays winter counts around the 2000 mark are regular. There are always birds present on the basin but the majority leave on the ebbing tide and return with the flow. The major food of the Eiders in the basin is mussels, though they are also seen regularly taking

cont. on Page 6

Scottish Bird News
No 83 Mar 2007

Edited by
Jimmy Maxwell
Ian Francis

Assisted by
Jean Torrance
Wendy Hicks

Contents

Montrose Basin LNR 1
News & Notices 3
From film to digital natural history photography 8
Finding out more about Scotland's Funny Buzzards 10
How Rum became a Nature Reserve 12
The South-east Scotland Non-estuarine Low Tide Count 1995-2006 13
Birds of the South Sea Islands 16
Pink-footed Geese: population, productivity and turnover 18
Notes & Comment 20
Book Reviews 22
Scottish Bird News Questionnaire 24

Contributions for the next issue of *SBN* should be submitted not later than 9th May 2007 to:

***SBN* Editor, SOC, The Scottish Birdwatching Resource Centre, Waterston House, Aberlady, East Lothian EH32 0PY.**

Articles can be sent on disc or by e-mail (mail@the-soc.org.uk), although we do still accept typed or handwritten material.

Designed by
Harry Scott, Pica Design, Aboyne

Printed by
Meigle Colour Printers Ltd, Galashiels

NEWS & NOTICES

New SOC Members

We welcome the following new members to the club: **Ayrshire** Mr J B Davies, Miss H Douglas, Ms C Gebhardt, Ms H Montgomery, **Borders** Ms L d'Esterre, Ms L Erasmuson, Mr H Harrison & Ms J Wright, D M Kemp, Mr D Oliver, **Central Scotland** Mrs K Egerton, Ms M Wotherspoon, **Clyde** Mr J Duncan, H L Hamilton, Mr I Hooper, Mr & Mrs J Park, **Dumfries** Mrs J Mylne, **England, Wales & NI** Mr & Mrs R Barron, Mr S J Palmer, Mrs L A Wilkinson, **Fife** Mr D Bottomer, Mr I Mashford, **Grampian** Mr R J M Stet, **Highland** B Cheeves & C Cook, Mr J Leestmans, Mrs M M F MacDonald, Ms S Murray, **Lothian** Mr B Allsop, Ms K Atchley, Mr C Attewell, Mr J G Bennie, Mr C Bonnington, Mr D Cave, Mr E Davidson, Mr D Dunlop & Ms A Cage, Graham Chalmers, Mr J Coutts, Mr & Mrs M Fisken and Family, Mrs A Frost, Miss J E Henderson, Mr J Henderson, Ms E Henderson, Mr K Ingleby, Mr & Mrs Jones, Mr L Kingstone, Miss K Lees, Mr G Levy, Miss S Light, Ms C Lyddon & Mr P Edwards, Dr H Marston and Family, W Miles, Mr G Milne, Fiona Mitchell, Mr A Roy, June Scott, Mr G Sieniawski, Mr & Mrs J Stevenson, Mr & Mrs T Strathdee, Mrs E Sweeney, Ms K Tannock, Mr S Winton, Violet Wardrop, Mr M J Woodward, **Scotland - no branch** Mr C Goodman, Mr P Harvey, **West Galloway** Mr & Mrs R Agnew.

200 Club

The latest prizewinners are – **November: 1st** £30 A. Anderson, **2nd** £20 G. Pearson, **3rd** £10 J. N. Schofield. **December: 1st** £30 Mrs. P. Black, **2nd** £20 Mrs. F. Hewlett, **3rd** £10 Bobby Smith. **January: 1st** £30 W.A.Craigie, **2nd** £20 Mrs. N. Stabler, **3rd** £10 R.S.Craig

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe

New members are always welcome. They must be SOC members and over 18. **Please contact – Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NH.**

Over the years, the SOC 200 Club has added greatly to SOC funds and enabled a variety of purchases. We are grateful to Daphne (photograph below) for working so hard to make it all happen.

Endowment Fund awards for Research and Surveys

As a response to an apparently-changing calendar of amateur research and fieldwork requiring funding, the Research & Surveys Committee have adopted (and had approved by Council) a slight departure from the previous policy of application final date.

With effect from 2007, therefore, although the final date for an application for an award will remain as 31 January, if there is any funding left over then this will be advertised in *Scottish Bird News* and on the SOC website, allowing further applications, but with a new cut-off date of 31 July.

It is unlikely that any further applications will be considered after this date.

Tom Dougall (for R&S Committee).

SOC/BTO/IWC Bird Atlas 2007-11

The new Bird Atlas covering the whole of Britain and Ireland gets underway in 2007. SOC are partners alongside BTO and Birdwatch Ireland and are leading the organisation in Scotland. This will be a four year project, mapping the distribution and abundance of all birds both in the breeding season and in winter. Fieldwork for the winter atlas component starts in November 2007, continuing through to February 2008, and will be repeated each winter until 2010-11. Fieldwork in the breeding season will commence next summer (April-July 2008) and will also last four years, running until summer 2011.

Regional organisers throughout Scotland are being appointed and will be looking for volunteers to take up the challenge of recording birds throughout the country. There will be two types of fieldwork. Roving recorders will compile species lists for one or more 10km squares. Selected tetrads (2x2km squares) will be surveyed using Timed Tetrad Visits where all birds will be counted in an hour's walk within one tetrad. Everyone can take part as all records during the survey months will count towards building the 10km square species lists. Full instructions are currently

being compiled and will be made available later this year. SOC and BTO are currently recruiting an Atlas Organiser for Scotland. Further details will be posted on the website in due course, but for now more can be found on www.birdatlas.net.

At least one area of Scotland will be running a local atlas in parallel with this national atlas. This will be southeast Scotland (Lothian and Borders) who plan to repeat their 1988-94 breeding season survey, and do the first systematic winter atlas in the area. Other areas are considering similar projects, although the Northeast Scotland Atlas has just finished fieldwork and Clackmannanshire are drawing to a close.

Watch this space for further updates during the year.

Mark Holling, SOC representative on Atlas Working Group

The Wilder Side of Glasgow!

Glasgow may not be the first place to spring to mind for a project on biodiversity, but in 2007 and 2008, people in the city will be invited to record the birds and butterflies found there for just that purpose. The Biodiversity in Glasgow (BIG) Project is being run by British Trust for Ornithology, Scotland and Butterfly Conservation Scotland and anyone in Glasgow who can spare two hours a month during the spring and summer is invited to take part.

Many of the green spaces found within our towns and cities, such as parks and gardens, are wonderful havens for wildlife. Sadly, however, some green spaces are poorly managed for biodiversity and under utilised by local communities. Others are disappearing, together with the wildlife that they hold. Consequently, there is huge scope to improve the biodiversity in urban sites, to protect existing sites that are of high conservation value and to encourage people to make greater use of their local green spaces.

Glasgow is an ideal place in which to explore urban diversity as over one fifth of the city is made up of green space including parks, river corridors, woodlands, cemeteries and communal gardens. In effect, the BIG project will be the most comprehensive survey of the birds and butterflies living within the city.

Starting this Spring, volunteers will be invited to survey one (or as many as they like!) of 130 sites across the city and asked to make a note of the birds and/or butterflies found, along with a simple description of the habitat. By spending time in green spaces, volunteers will have the opportunity to discover the wildlife that can be found on their own doorstep and who knows, maybe even unearth a few unusual species!

Out learning how to survey *Jacqui Kaye*

Initial training class *Jacqui Kaye*

Surveying on their own *Jacqui Kaye*

Birds and butterflies can be used as indicators of the wildlife value of green spaces and have the added advantage of being relatively easy to survey. The information collected by volunteers will be analysed to determine the species richness and abundance of the breeding birds and butterflies found within Glasgow's urban environment. This data will be used to help manage Glasgow's green spaces in order to enhance urban biodiversity.

In addition to giving us information about biodiversity in Glasgow, the BIG Project will look at urban wildlife in other Scottish towns and cities. Information from two other national BTO bird surveys, the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey and BTO/CJ Garden BirdWatch will be included to help us learn about urban wildlife in other parts of Scotland.

You don't have to be an expert in birds or butterflies to take part in the BIG project as training in basic identification and recording methods will be available to volunteers. If you'd like to get involved please email glasgowbiodiversity@bto.org, phone 01786 466 560, or go to www.bto.org/survey/special/glasgow_biodiversity. Bird recording will take place from April to June and butterflies from May to September. If you live outside of Glasgow but would like to take part, please ask about getting involved in Garden BirdWatch.

Jacqui Kaye

Bird Recording in Scotland

The first meeting for 3 years of Scottish Local Bird Recorders was held at the Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) headquarters at Waterston House, Aberlady, East Lothian on Saturday 9th December. Fifteen of Scotland's 20 local bird recorders made the journey to Aberlady from their widely scattered recording areas: the furthest travelled attendees included Micky Maher (Shetland), Jim Williams (Orkney), Andrew Stevenson (Outer Hebrides) and Paul Collin (Dumfries & Galloway). Also present were representatives from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) – Claire Seymour (Inverness), Alan McKirdy (Perth) and Rhys Bulman (Edinburgh).

Another long distance migrant was Oliver Grafton from the National Biodiversity Network (NBN), a charity based in Peterborough. The NBN aims to encourage sharing of wildlife information across the UK via an easy to use website called the NBN Gateway (www.searchnbn.net). At the moment birds are under-represented on the site, hence the current SNH funded project to get Scottish bird records "digitised" – co-ordinated by Dr. Clive McKay of SOC. RSPB Scotland have recently added Corncrake survey results to the NBN – to see a map of the Corncrake's distribution in the UK click on the above link and simply type in "Corncrake" in the search box.

Oliver Grafton explained how the NBN works, using a live internet link to the web-site. Thanks to SNH funding, bird recording in Scotland is on the brink of a new digital era, in which over 200,000 bird records per year from all over Scotland will be added to the NBN web-site. This information will then become much more accessible to the people of Scotland via distribution maps on the NBN Gateway.

Janet Crummy, President of the SOC, welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the speakers. For some it was the first visit to the new building, purpose built a year ago by SOC to act as a resource centre for Scottish bird watchers. It also acts as the SOC's headquarters and houses its extensive reference library. The building is named after George Waterston, who founded the club and did such a lot for Scottish birdwatchers; we also have the Donald Watson Gallery, where the SOC holds wildlife painting and photographic exhibitions.

The main reason for the meeting was to discuss the way forward for Scottish birdwatchers to record their bird observations in a standard spreadsheet format, so that they can be stored in a central Scottish data-base at Waterston House, and then passed on to the National Biodiversity Network (NBN).

Other topics on the agenda included the future of the Scottish Bird Report, the forth-coming new ground-breaking book on the Birds of Scotland (due to be published next autumn by the SOC), the work of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, the Scottish Birds Records Committee, BTO's BirdTrack and the new BTO/SOC/IWC Bird Atlas, for which fieldwork begins in 2008. All these are a large and very important part of why the SOC exists, but we also aim to encourage all those in Scotland with an interest in birds. Why not attend a branch meeting at one of our many branches throughout Scotland. You're sure of a warm welcome.

If you are interested, then please visit our web site at www.the-soc.org.uk

Janet Crummy, SOC President

Spring means *Bird Survey* time

For many of us, the dawn chorus will be a welcome feature of a long-awaited spring. This natural phenomenon will be used by birdwatchers across Scotland and indeed the UK as they record the birds in their Breeding Bird Survey squares.

The Breeding Bird Survey is the UK's premier survey for keeping track of our breeding birds. The results are used by government and a variety of conservation organisations, as the status of wild bird populations is an important indicator of the health of the countryside. So by taking part, BBS observers are putting themselves in the driving seat of bird conservation science!

If you're thinking about taking part, then now is the time to contact your BTO Regional Rep, who'll be delighted to set you up with a square. The survey is designed to be quick, simple and, most importantly, an enjoyable birdwatching exercise. Just four to five hours of fieldwork are required per year and the main skills needed are to be able to identify most common breeding species by sight and sound.

You don't need to know the calls of all species as CDs and cassettes are provided. If you're less confident about your ability to identify bird calls and feel like getting away from it all, why not think about taking on an upland square? There are fewer species to identify and they can be more easily spotted in the open habitats.

You can find out how to contact your Regional Rep at www.bto.org/regional. For more information, contact BTO Scotland on 01786 466 560 or scotlandbbs@bto.org, or go to www.bto.org/bbs.

Jacqui Kaye

Surveying in the Sma Glen *Graeme Garner*

cont. from Page 2
crabs. In the 1990s, a season of mussel-dredging, only later proved to be illegal, was followed by a decline of several hundreds in the Eider population although a direct link was never proven. Whatever the cause, no further dredging has occurred and numbers have once again recovered. First records of Eiders as a breeding species were in 1961. Now the breeding population is 330 pairs. Recent pest control measures on the reserve have seen Eider productivity increase. Many females were being lost, particularly along a fence line that appeared to be patrolled by foxes. Control of fox numbers has now seen a corresponding decrease in loss of brooding birds. Carrion Crows still present a risk particularly to exposed eggs; those birds nesting under the cover of Gorse are most successful.

Mute Swans were originally attracted to the Montrose Basin and Docks in numbers during the 1930s when waste from newly established food processing factories was discharged into the river. This year round, food supply was augmented by an inflow of sewage from Montrose and also waste farm produce such as potatoes and carrots, which were dumped into the basin during the early winter by local farmers and it became an important site for moulting and wintering flocks. There is still a moult flock averaging around 200 birds present in June/July; this population is then maintained through the winter months.

In the early 1980s, the establishment of the reserve controls on such discharges halted these practices, but this in turn led to other issues for reserve managers. As natural food supplies on the basin dwindle around mid-winter, the Mute Swans, which were once able to switch their attentions to the unnatural foods sources, are frustrated. Rather than move elsewhere, they turn to the winter crop for food. Oilseed rape (OSR) is preferred, but cereals are also readily grazed. The Mute Swan Management Project was set up in 1998 and through this, a sacrificial field of OSR was made available to the swans each year. The farmer owning the field was then compensated through contributions from the members of the management group that included other reserve farmers, SWT, AC, NTS and SNH. Swans often need to be scared off crops and encouraged onto the sacrificial field, and for this purpose the project created and funded the post of swan scarer, a role filled on an ad hoc basis. This scheme was effective but it relied on suitable fields being available and as swan numbers have increased, bigger sacrificial fields have been needed to support the population, resulting this year in a switch to feeding solely with waste grain.

Prior to 2005/6, peak **Whooper Swan** numbers had been less than 20 but in that winter numbers increased to 95 in addition to the established Mute Swan flock. With over 300 swans now looking for food, supplementary feeding was required. This year, with the high numbers of swans expected and a lack of suitable sacrificial crops, feeding with waste grain became the preferred option, along with a zero tolerance of birds on crops immediately around the basin and so far it seems that this option has been easier and the cost is less. This year the Whooper flock numbers around 140 birds. In 2006 for the second consecutive year, the Montrose Basin numbers will be above the threshold for National Significance in terms of Whooper Swan numbers. The project has now been running for eight years. Although the planners have had to remain flexible in their approach, it has alleviated conflict between the farmers and LNR managers since 1998 and seen an increase in the swan population on the reserve.

Site Description and Access.

The River South Esk exits the basin at its Eastern edge bounded to the North by Montrose and to the South by Ferryden. The Aberdeen-Dundee railway runs North/ South here. For the public transport user, arrival on a winter's morning train can provide fine views of the basin's Pink-footed Goose population as well as flocks of Eider and waders including Curlew, Oystercatcher and Godwit of both species. The Tayock Burn enters the basin in the NE corner and public parking is available here near the St Christopher caravan park. Although this is the most urban part of the reserve, it provides good views out onto favoured goose roosts during early winter.

Free car-parking for the two hides in the NW corner of the reserve is at the Old Mill Car Park. Access to both these hides is through farmland, much of which is in Rural Stewardship. Wide margins, headlands and beetle banks provide cover and food for a variety of threatened species. Linnets are seen throughout the year, as are Grey Partridge - both species breed here – and Yellowhammers regularly sing from hawthorn scrub near the track. On the arable areas of the reserve there is also a healthy population of Brown Hares.

The Wigeon hide is a 1400m walk from the car park. This hide really comes into its own on a rising winter's tide. The flooded fields on either side of the track provide summer breeding for Oystercatcher and Redshank, whilst in winter, flocks of Curlew and Black-tailed Godwit congregate here. The hide itself provides an elevated vantage point from which to scan both the estuarine mud and the area of salt marsh immediately beneath the hide. Much of the basin's bird life can be viewed from here; on a high tide the saltings become crowded with waders whilst the water is thick with wildfowl. Many of the basin's 5,000 Wigeon congregate here as do Shelduck, Eider, Teal along with the occasional Scaup or Long tailed Duck and for the sharp-eyed observer maybe a Green-winged Teal or American Wigeon. Short-eared Owls were once a regular sight feeding around the salt marsh and fields but are now seen less frequently, although Peregrine and Sparrowhawk are regular.

Wigeon Hide *Neil Mitchell*

Reed Bunting *Eric McCabe*

Carrying on straight past the junction for the Wigeon hide leads to the Mill Burn reed bed. Both Sedge Warbler and Reed Bunting breed here. It is also an important roost site in the late summer when up to a thousand Hirundines, mainly Swallows and Sand Martins, can be seen flocking in. The mouth of the Mill Burn is also a good spot to see Common Sandpiper and Greenshank. Otters, which visit the reserve in the winter, are often seen here, but there is no conclusive evidence of breeding to date.

The Shelduck hide looks out over the confluence of the South Esk and Mill Burn. Goosander, of which around six pairs are estimated to breed on the reserve, may be seen with young from here. Another breeding species often encountered here is Eider, with over 300 pairs breeding on the basin - many of them in the scrubby thickets in this part of the reserve.

The car park at Old Montrose is a little tricky to find so pop into the Visitor Centre if you need directions - it is well worth locating. A walk along beside the wet grassland and reeds of the 'Lurgies' to the wader roost of Miss Erskine's bank is enjoyable throughout the year. Beside the car park, there is always the possibility of a Kingfisher at the burn mouth - the species probably nests nearby and young have been ringed on the basin. Water Rails are seen and have bred in the reeds to the left. Walking along the sea wall gives views over the tidal flats of the basin - another reliable spot to see Greenshank on passage - up to 19 have been counted here. Most of the wader species and wildfowl can be seen from this stretch of seawall.

The viewing gallery at the Visitor Centre has telescopes set up looking out over an artificial Sand Martin wall in which at least 24 pairs nested in 2006 - beside this is a favoured Kingfisher perch. There are also displays and interactive interpretation for the young and old alike. The Centre provides a view out over the whole basin and so is often a good place to locate Ospreys, which feed on flounder and the occasional salmon or sea trout. Also in winter, Pintail, Shoveler and Scaup are usually visible and occasionally Red-throated Diver or Long-tailed Duck can be seen. The ponds, disused salt pans and tidal mud in front of the Centre provide a variety of waders; this year, two Spotted Redshank and a Green Sandpiper were all visible through the one pair of bins! The Visitor Centre grounds hold the usual selection of garden birds but again can yield the odd scarcer species, for example Great Grey Shrike that is now almost an annual visitor and in winter and Water Rail which are sometimes seen dashing from pond to pond.

Although Montrose isn't renowned for its rarities, a fair selection of rare or scarce birds has been recorded over the years. These include Green-winged Teal, American Wigeon and Great Northern Diver. Little Egrets are now annual visitors and Spoonbill were present in 1998-2002. Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint are seen in varying numbers each year and in December 2001, an Ivory Gull spent seven days on the reserve. Over the reserve boundary in 2005 was an Isabelline Shrike, whilst Ferryden, a mile from the Visitor Centre where the South Esk finally meets the sea, has for the last two winters had a long-staying Bonaparte's Gull.

The reserve provides a great day's bird watching all year round and there is always a warm welcome at the Visitor Centre where snacks and a tea/coffee machine are available. Staff & volunteers are on hand with the latest sightings, tide times and other useful information, so we look forward to welcoming you.

Facilities

The Visitor Centre opening times are daily:
15th March–15th November from
10.30 am–5.00pm

16th November–14th March
Friday–Sunday from 10.30–4.00pm

(Closed 25-26 Dec. and 1-2nd Jan.)

The reserve and hides are open at all times. Adults £3.00, Concessions £2.00 SWT members & children free.

Note keys are no longer required for any SWT hides contrary to some publications. Nearby sites; SWT Lintrathen and Balgavies.

Neil Mitchell, Montrose Basin Ranger
Scottish Wildlife Trust, Montrose Basin, Wildlife Centre, Rossie Braes, Montrose, Angus DD10 9TJ. Tel: 01674 676336, Fax: 01674 678773

From film to digital natural history photography

A Heron photography trip at Loch Feochan near Oban (with father's shadow on left) *Charles Palmar*

Clyde SOC member, David Palmar, has been kind enough on occasion to supply us on request with excellent photographic illustration for our articles. Here he describes his own journey from enthusiastic amateur, through all the technical stages towards a professional career. His findings, mistakes and all, may inspire other members along similar paths. Ed.

My own introduction to natural history photography

I grew up with the photographic example of my late father Charles Eric Palmar, one of the leading ornithologists of his day, who was first a medical photographer, then the Curator of Natural History in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow from 1949 to 1984. With my father, my mother (a biology teacher) and my two brothers, I spent many happy holidays in a Bedford Dormobile during the 1950s and 1960s all round Scotland.

Every spring weekend, we would go to Argyllshire, (not that twisty, boring Loch Lomond road yet again!) and dad would study eagles, divers or herons. Later I would help carry his heavy hide, cameras and tape recorder to a heronry, or in winter we would study Greylags in the Kelvin Valley or the Endrick Marshes, or Pinkfeet on Flanders Moss.

I remember creeping out under a hedge in the Kelvin Valley, and getting really excited when a huge flock of Greylags landed all round me, cackling loudly. What a sight and sound! I have never forgotten that, although it must be 40 years ago now (see Greylags below).

Every July in the 1950s, as soon as school finished, we would set off for the northern Highlands (after 1964 the Outer Hebrides, when the car ferry from Uig started) on our annual two-week bird holiday. I remember seeing Hen Harriers, Golden Eagles, Red-necked Phalaropes and both Arctic and Great Skuas.

I had obtained my first camera as a Christmas present in 1965 – a Kodak Retinette 1B, with flash cube. Its 50mm lens was good for people, but no use for bird photography!

My next cameras were SLRs – a Yashica J-P, a Pentax K1000 and finally an Olympus OM-2. This had semi-automatic exposure, in which turning the aperture and/or shutter speed rings controlled a needle in the viewfinder. I used an ancient telephoto, with a relatively small aperture, which was taped to a tin can, and mounted on bellows, which were attached to the front of the SLR. Manual focus was obtained by moving the bellows with a knurled knob. Latterly, I actually had some lenses bought in a shop!

After a gap in bird photography due to children (bird photography and children don't mix very well), I bought a second hand Canon EOS50, and a Kowa telescope, to which I attached the camera with a T2 mount - FilmScoping!. With an aperture limited to f11 at best, and a focal length of 800mm, I chose a fast ISO 800 print film.

After a year or two, I gave up using the telescope system. For action shots, it was not much use, as the limited aperture made the shutter speed too slow. Secondly, you had to focus manually. Thirdly, you absolutely had to use a tripod and a shutter release, so it was a cumbersome system. Finally, I had made the mistake of buying an angled telescope instead of straight through one, so I couldn't find the subject easily, and it was impossible to use the system in the car, as your head hit the roof when trying to look through the camera!

By now, I was getting the nature photography bug more seriously, and invested in my first new film camera for 20 years, a Canon EOS3, and my first new lens, a 100-400 f4.5-5.6 IS L. The EOS3, a semi-professional camera, still auto-focussed even with the 1.4x extender, so I had a choice of 400mm at f5.6, 560mm at f8 or by using a 2x extender, 800mm at f11, which was manual-focus only. The image stabilisation still worked even with a 2x extender on the lens.

I tried Fuji Provia 400F transparency film (ISO 400), which a review in Amateur Photographer said had very little grain. I believed this until I started to scan my slides and look at them on a computer. They often looked grainy at 100% (although others could be OK). This film was also too contrasty, especially with a black and white bird in the sunlight, which washed out the highlights.

Greylag Geese in flight *David Palmar*

I should have accepted the advice of a well-known bird photographer, who said I should use 100 ISO film and push it to ISO 200. I thought I knew better, and didn't think I could get a fast enough shutter speed by doing that. However, you learn by your mistakes – I should have accepted the limitations of the slower, less contrasty film, and not tried to be too ambitious to get the perfect shot!

The digital era

In April 2003, I was standing at the Falls of Clyde, photographing the Peregrine Falcons through a second-hand 1000mm Sigma lens, when a German visitor appeared with his family. In his hand was a Canon EOS D60, a 6 megapixel camera I had already read about. We agreed to try out each other's equipment. He set the ISO speed to 100, and he used mirror lock and a shutter release, stopped down the lens, and took some shots at between 1/20 sec and 1/100 sec. When he got home, he emailed me a jpg of fantastic quality – it was pin sharp!

Peregrine action at Falls of Clyde some years later
David Palmar

By early May I had bought a second hand D60 from reputable British photo dealer. Since then, I have bought nearly all my equipment second-hand, all from British dealers who advertise in Amateur Photographer, and (touch wood), never had a problem with any of it.

I sold my EOS3 after its value had declined to a quarter of what I paid for it! I now have a Canon 20D and a 5D, but I almost never use the 20D, because the 5D with its full frame sensor (24 x 36mm) can be used at ISO 800 with very little noise, whereas I don't like pushing the 20D beyond ISO 400. Also, the 5D produces the huge files I am looking for.

For some reason, I always shot in "raw" mode right from the beginning – although at the time I didn't really know why! It's a decision I have never regretted, as "raw" files contain all the data that the camera is capable of shooting, whereas "jpg" throws away some of the detail as it compresses the files.

With the 5D, I use the Canon 100-400 image stabilised lens, which is great for hand-held shooting and is light enough to take up mountains. For longer distance shots, I use second-hand Sigma EX telephoto prime lenses on a tripod (heavy!). Even big prime lenses can be balanced on the window sill of the car by using a bean bag, although I frequently use a tripod too.

What I would do if starting out now

If I were starting out now on a budget with digital SLRs for nature photography, as a Canon user, I would buy two sharp lenses, say a 24-70 f2.8 Sigma EX lens (£250 or less), and a second hand prime 400 f5.6L (£500 if you're lucky – the biggest cheapest lens you can comfortably hand hold), and a consumer digital SLR body (look for a second hand 10 megapixel EOS400D any time now for less than £400).

I would buy a Pod bean bag, which screws into the base of the camera or the lens foot, a lightweight tripod (so that you take it with you!), a shutter release, and a memory card of at least 2Gb. You will also need a rucksack to carry it all, and a shoulder bag for keeping your camera with lens attached at the ready.

Modern digiscoping systems, for people who already have a telescope, are a cheaper but more limiting option than the digital SLR route. With the addition of a suitable adapter, a compact digital camera can give good shots of static subjects in the right conditions through a telescope.

Canon DSLR cameras come with a "raw" converter (Zoom Browser or Digital Photo Professional). You will also need Photoshop Elements, or an equivalent program. In that way, you'll discover the delights and problems with digital, without a vast expenditure, and you can decide how you want to proceed thereafter.

You also need a capable computer with Windows XP, or a Macintosh, and you need to back up your files. You can buy a perfectly normal IDE internal hard disc at modest cost (a few tens of pounds, and get an external casing to put it in (£25), connected to your computer by USB. If you are really serious, buy two such external hard disc systems, and keep one off-site, refreshing its contents via a memory stick as you create new files.

www.photoscot.co.uk is born

I realised after shooting many hundreds of wildlife photos, (and throwing away many more hundreds) that I was building up a resource that was worth sharing with other people, and making a contribution to wildlife conservation. I started my company David Palmar Photography in 2004, and the above website in March 2006.

A recent shot of Great crested Grebes greeting each other *David Palmar*

Over the years I have contributed photographs not only to Scottish Bird News, but also to several other organisations, some of whom have actually paid me! I hope to expand my business, so that I can retire early from teaching Computing and receive an income from my photography.

There is a huge backlog of thousands of slides and digital images to put on the website, and I keep going out and taking more! A recent development has been scanning some of my father's old black and white images, taken during and after the Second World War with large format cameras, and some of his Ektachrome 6x6 cm transparencies, taken with a Bronica in the 1960s to 1980s.

The latest development is my involvement with the new wildlife holiday company called Wild Caledonia (www.wildcaledonia.co.uk), as part of a team led by John Simpson, the well-known expert in many fields of ornithology.

If you would like to know more about my efforts, feel free to visit www.photoscot.co.uk - it is an ever-changing website which covers all aspects of the computer-photography relationship and offers varied personal services including photography talks and walks, technical advice and photograph sales to suit all requirements.

I would like to thank all the people who have helped me over the past few years, including those in organisations such as the SOC, RSPB, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Glasgow Natural History Society and the Argyll Bird Club. I have built up contacts with many people in these groups, and been led to interesting sites and given lots of help and information which has assisted me in photographing many species. Finally I would like to thank the SOC for extending to me the opportunity to write this article.

David Palmar
info@photoscot.co.uk

Roy Dennis

Finding out more about Scotland's Funny Buzzards

Have you ever seen a funny Buzzard in late summer that demanded a second look? Long tail, level wings, slim head? Is it a Honey-buzzard, one of those fabled birds that few have had the opportunity of seeing in Scotland? It might well be, but you had better check carefully. I first came to know HBs, as they are colloquially referred to, in North Yorkshire when I worked there with the Forestry Commission, being introduced to them by Henry Bunce, then in his eighties, and Ron Appleby, who studied the small population breeding in the local forests. I was delighted to find that when I moved north to the Highlands in 1996, that there were a few funny Buzzards worth keeping an eye open for.

History of HBs in Scotland

The earliest record of Honey-buzzard in Scotland is of a bird shot at Chatelherault, Lanarkshire in autumn 1831, and there were few other records until breeding was first established in Scotland in 1867 when a nest with two eggs was found at Abergeldie, Aberdeenshire. Unfortunately, in keeping with the unfortunate practices of the 19th century, the male was killed by the gamekeeper a week before the female was shot by the forester in the nest on 12 July. However, the first proof of nesting in the Highlands came in 1871.

A similar fate to the Aberdeenshire birds also befell a pair found near Newport, in Fife in 1949, when in the early months of summer, breeding was strongly suspected. Once again the attempt was put in jeopardy when the female was shot on 23 July.

There were few other records until Breeding Atlas I (1968-72) when birds were again found during the breeding season. During the next 20-30 years a small number of Highland ornithologists have traced the fortunes of this elusive raptor. Details of their findings have recently been drawn together and will be included in *Birds of Scotland 3*, but over the years Honey-buzzards have been noted at over 50 different sites and breeding proved in at least seven different recording areas.

Why *Honey*-buzzards?

The main food of Honey-buzzards is the grubs of social wasps, and the buzzard's late spring arrival in Scotland and delayed breeding cycle is all geared up to the summer abundance of this prey species. Finding the empty paper combs of wasps strewn under trees beneath the forest canopy can be one of the clues than can help point to a breeding attempt. However, care has to be taken - wasp-combs are also dug up by Badgers, and so finding this evidence within a wood is not a definitive sign of the presence of Honey-buzzards. HBs are well adapted to hunting wasps; they have strong powerful feet with relatively short talons for excavating underground nests, narrow nostrils to prevent them from being stung internally and small scaly head feathering which protects them as they dig up the nests. HBs do not exclusively feed on wasp grubs, as visits to their nests have found the remains of young thrushes and Woodpigeons. At another nest the remains of two young Woodcock were found, but the finds that perhaps might initially be most unexpected are the remains of Frogs. These are not unusual at HB nests and are indicative of their hunting pattern; Honey-buzzards tend to sit quietly on a branch below the canopy, quietly watching for wasps and other prey.

Satellite tracking project

In spring 2000, Roy Dennis (Highland Foundation for Wildlife) approached Forestry Commission Scotland about a joint project that would investigate the migratory patterns of some of the Scottish Honey-buzzards. The project involved fitting tiny transmitters weighing 23g that could be tracked by satellites. The aims of the project were:

- to identify the routes and duration and to establish whether they undertake long sea crossings
- to identify wintering grounds and whether they move during the winter
- to study the spring migration of adults
- to establish the behaviour of first years and to find out how many stay in West Africa in their second summer.

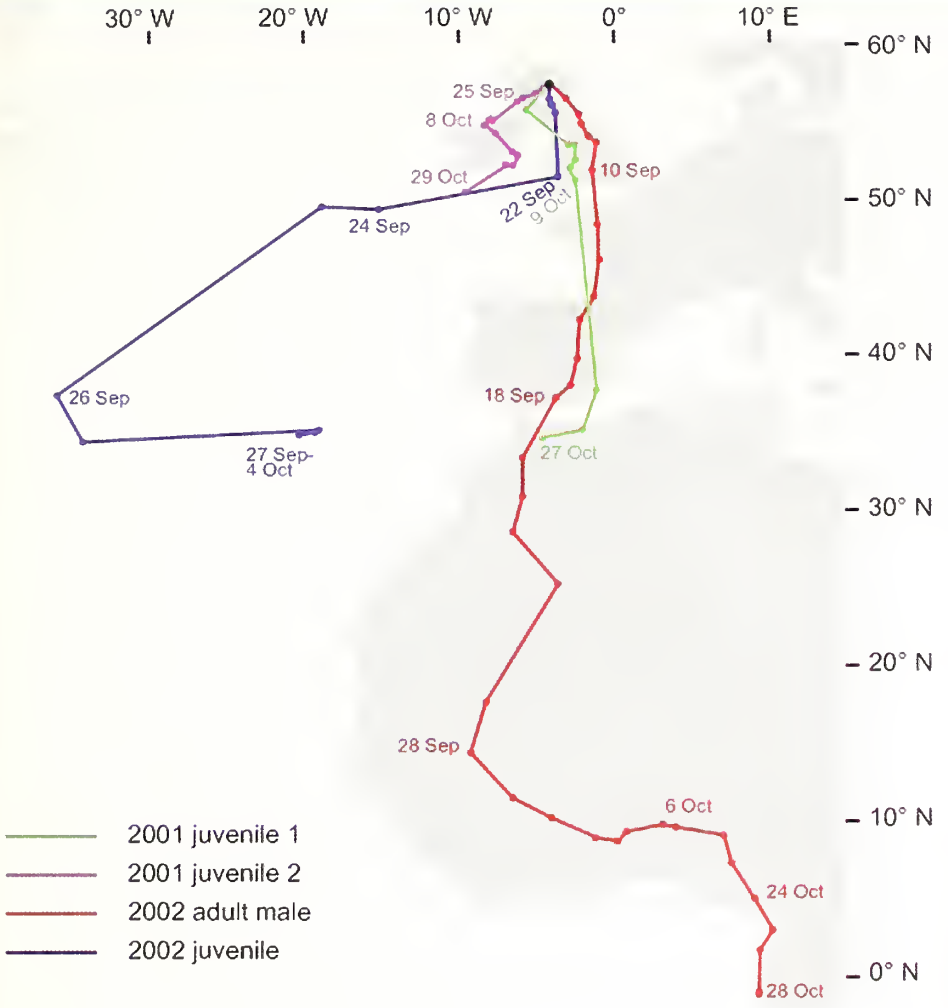
To date, five young Honey-buzzards and an adult male have been tracked. In 2001, two young birds were tagged and successfully set off on migration. Unfortunately the transmitters on these birds stopped operating part-way through their journeys, possibly because of battery failure, although by that time one chick was out in the Atlantic Ocean SW of Ireland and the other was in Morocco. In 2002, the adults returned to the same nest, but only reared one chick from a clutch of two eggs. When the chick was well-grown, we were fortunate enough to catch the adult male and attach a transmitter.

That year the transmitters worked perfectly showing the determined migration of the adult male, which on leaving the Highlands on 5th September, travelled almost without stopping for 35

Roy Dennis with one of the 2001 chicks
Hugh Insley

Table 1.

Nest site	Year	Number of (eggs) chicks	Date hatched	Date adult left Highlands	Dates chicks left Highlands
A	2000	(2)	Not hatched by 4 August	Not known	Did not fledge
A	2001	(2) 2	17 & 19July	Not known	13 & 18 September
A	2002	(2) 1	6 & 7 July	5 September	15 September
B	2006	(2) 2	5 & 11 July	After 4 September	8 & 16-18 September



days to Nigeria, where he spent ten days before moving south and crossing the equator to the coastal forests of Gabon. By contrast, the migration of the juvenile did not have a happy ending. It left nine days after the adult male and was caught by strong easterly winds as it departed from south Wales and was blown out into the Atlantic Ocean. Astonishingly this bird flew uninterruptedly for over 100 hours over the ocean before perishing 300 km from Madeira. This bird and the young birds in 2001, had all taken a 'western' route through Britain, which perhaps had made them more vulnerable to weather conditions that would drift them out into the Atlantic.

Migration routes of Honey-buzzards from Highland in 2001 and 2002 (Source: *BS3*)

During 2003-2005 we were unable to find any nests with young suitable for the project, so we were delighted to be able to continue the project in 2006 when two young were again fitted with transmitters. These young travelled through England on a more easterly course making a relatively short sea crossing of the Channel via the Isle of Wight and Kent, before travelling south and passing to the east of the Pyrenees. One of the 2006 birds took a very interesting route through the Rhine valley to Switzerland, where remarkably it was observed, and on to the Italian/French border, where once again it was seen near Nice migrating west.

Both these birds made successful migrations across the Sahara and eventually stopped in Mali and Senegal in late October. Here one of the batteries failed and transmissions stopped, but in early December the other bird started to move east and by the year-end had settled in south-east Nigeria. For full details of all the migrations visit www.roydennis.org/honeybuzzard.

In addition to letting us know more of their migration, the satellite tracking study has, through careful observation of a few nests, meant that more is now understood about the breeding phenology of HBs in Scotland. The table provides some of the preliminary information already discovered about the timing of breeding, although there is also further historical data that is now being collated.

The Honey-buzzard tracking project has taught us a lot about the 'real time' migration of HBs from Scotland and a more detailed analysis of the migration that explores the effects of weather condition on their progress is being prepared. Equally the transmissions show that Honey-buzzards turn up in places where they have never been seen, or even imagined, in other parts of Scotland during their migration.

Thanks are due to the key members of the team who watch and study the Honey-buzzards in Highland: Roy Dennis, Brian Etheridge, and also to Malcolm Harvey who assisted with the preparation of this article.

David C. Jardine

Looking for Honey-buzzards in Scotland

Desmond Nethersole-Thompson divided birders into 'leggers' and 'arsers', depending on the effort they put into watching and finding birds. Honey-buzzards are definitely an 'arser's bird'. They are secretive birds that live within forests, often below the tree canopy, so legging around forests rarely leads to sightings. The best way to try to find them is to select a good vantage point within a forested landscape and to arrive in mid-morning on a bright day with your telescope and be prepared to 'land-watch' for a period of at least four hours. The best times to look for them are in late May and again from mid-July through until the end of August. If you are fortunate you may witness their wonderful 'butterfly' display. Interpreting this display is not easy, as it has been recorded in areas where no breeding attempt has been found. Judging from our knowledge of the sites they have used in Scotland, there are quite a few other forests which appear suitable... all that is really required is for more folk to get out and sit on their backsides and look for them to help find out how many there may really be!

How Rum became a Nature Reserve

View across Loch Scrisort *Jimmy Maxwell*

While there is ample documentation for the past history of the island of Rum up to the time that it became a sporting estate, and its subsequent career as a National Nature Reserve (Love 2001), little has been said about how fifty years ago it was transformed from one to the other.

When I was a medical student at Cambridge in the late 1940s, I became friends with some mountaineers who used to enthuse about the rocks on an "enchanted island" off the west coast of Scotland. It was generally thought to be strictly private, and Darling (1947) had little to say about its natural history. They had discovered that if you wrote to its owner, Lady Bullough, who lived nearby, from a Cambridge address, asking permission to visit it, promising to be self-supporting, and enclosing a stamped, self-addressed envelope (otherwise there was no reply), she would buy another stamp and instruct her steward, Duncan Macnaughten, to take you ashore. So David Whitham, Ross Macleod and I jumped through these hoops and visited the island during 19-26 June 1950. Mr Macnaughten suggested we camp in front of the limekiln by the shore, and then left us to our own devices until he debriefed us at tea before we left, when he gave an exciting account of the extinct White-tailed Eagles nesting at Shamnan Insir "before the war" - without explaining it was the First War.

In due course it emerged that we were not quite the first ornithological visitors. The island had already been illicitly visited by the notorious Waterston Gang in June 1934. An older member of the Cambridge Bird Club, Georgiana Rhodes, niece of Cecil of that ilk, last of three formidable lady members also including E.L. Turner (of Scolt Head) and Maude Haviland Brindley (of the Hebrides and Siberia), had also regularly visited it with Lady Bullough, and must surely have forcibly made the case to her during long summer evenings on the island that Rhum, as it was called then, deserved to become a nature reserve. This would have been reinforced by Professor J.W. Heslop Harrison (of Newcastle University) who regularly toured the Hebrides with parties in summer between 1935-1950 studying the natural history and searching for survivors of the glaciations (Heslop Harrison 1951). He stayed with the Bulloughs in Kinloch Castle while on Rum, when his party had to make do with a bothy and tents. The butler at Kinloch later commented "the Professor kept something up his sleeve - either a butterfly or a plant - to discover every year" (Sabbagh 1999:98). This must have reinforced the idea that the island deserved conservation. Whatever one thinks of Heslop Harrison's records, he at least deserves credit for this.

According to Karl Sebbagh (1999) the Master of our Cambridge college, Christs, Charles Raven, Vice Chancellor of the University, Professor of Divinity, a Royal Chaplain, natural historian and author of rather good popular bird books (he was also very tall- there were giants on the earth in those days), doubted some of Harrison's reports, and encouraged his son John, a Classicist at King's College and amateur botanist, to look into them. In due course John Raven (1949) reported that some plants appeared to have been introduced. We knew of this, but did not pay much attention to plants- it would have been different if I had realised that the doubtful records also included Large Blue butterflies (Campbell 1975). This scandal must have helped direct attention to the island elsewhere, and the need to put its affairs in order. During 25-30 July 1955, I visited the island again to camp out among the Manx Shearwaters, and then sent a list of its birds to the "Scottish Naturalist" (Bourne1957). The Editor, Professor Vero Wynne-Edwards, later commented that it arrived at a most opportune moment, when the Nature Conservancy was debating whether to buy the island, apparently on easy terms, from Lady Bullough. So fifty years ago Rum duly became a National Nature Reserve, shown to the world during the 1966 IOC Cruise.

In recent years the most prominent activity on Rum has been study of the proliferating herd of Red Deer. There are now protests because it is proposed to reduce their numbers in the interests of the natural vegetation, and a suggestion that Wolves might be tried out for this (Smith 2007), not a very good idea on the island that may hold the largest colony of Manx Shearwaters in the world. It is debatable if it is a proper use of nature reserves to allow the uncontrolled proliferation of assorted mammals, as in the case of feral Sheep on St Kilda, or Black Rats on the Shiant Islands in the Minch (where while Puffins may survive, there are apparently no small storm-petrels), when there are now no islands of any size around Britain free from them (Bourne 1975). It seems time such activities were moved elsewhere.

References

Bourne, W.R.P. 1957. The Birds of the Island of Rhum. Scott. Nat. 69: 21-31.

Bourne, W.R.P. 1975. Mammals on islands. New Scientist 67: 422- 425 (and subsequent correspondence).

Campbell, J.L. 1975. Entomologists' Record 87: 161-166.

Darling, F.F. 1947. Natural History in the Highlands and Islands. Collins, London.

Heslop Harrison, J.W. 1951. The passing of the Ice Age and its effect upon the plant and animal life of the Western Isles. New Naturalist Journal 1951: 83-90.

Raven, J. 1949. Alien plant introductions on the Isle of Rhum. Nature, 163: 104-105, 15 Jan.

Sabbagh, K. 1999. A Rum Affair. Allen Lane, The Penguin Pess.

Smith, L. 2007. How a pack of wolves could enliven the Scots economy. Times, 31 January.

Bill Bourne
wrpbourne@yahoo.co.u

Coast below Tantallon Castle *Ian Andrews*

The South-east Scotland Non-estuarine Low Tide Count 1995-2006

Photographs in this article illustrate some sections of the coast from north to south; most were taken in January 2007.

In 1995 the BTO asked bird-watchers in Scotland to take part in a pilot project to count wildfowl and waders at low tide along the coastlines of Scotland which were not covered by the monthly BoEE (Birds of Estuary Enquiry, now coastal Wetland Bird Survey) counts. This pilot was in anticipation of a full survey of selected coasts conducted in 1997-98. The SOC Discussion Group based in Edinburgh is a forum for local SOC members who enjoy regular fieldwork and surveys, and at one of the monthly meetings it was suggested that rather than surveying selected parts of the coast, we should organise a co-ordinated count along the whole of the Lothian and Borders coast from Gullane Point in East Lothian right the way round to the English border, a distance of nearly 70km. By counting this whole stretch on the same day, we could gain much better data about the wintering birds of our rocky coasts in the middle of winter, information previously lacking. This count proved to be so popular that it has been repeated every January since then, the most recent being on Sunday 21st January 2007, when the counts also contributed to the national NEWS (Non-estuarine Coastal Waterbird Survey) co-ordinated by BTO throughout Britain.

Since that first year, the counts have broadened to include all species encountered on the survey. The focus is on inter-tidal waders and waterfowl on the sea, especially Eider, Goldeneye, divers and any other sea-duck, but we also diligently count gulls and any passerines either on the shore or visible from the beach or from the cliff top. The full methodology and results will be presented in due course in a short paper in *Scottish Birds*, with supplementary tables on the SOC website and in the Lothian and Borders local bird reports. This article however is intended to give a taste of the survey to those unaware of its existence, and to provide an appreciation for all the efforts of the counting teams. With the survey this January, there have now been 13 counts, and during all that time, 44 volunteers have taken part; their names are included at the end.

The coast is divided into 16 sections which are counted by between one and three volunteers. In the 13 years to date, only two sections have been missed owing to last minute personal reasons. By and large, the same core of counters has participated every year, many taking ownership of the same stretches. This has enabled them to become the local expert in that piece of shore, in the species they find there and exactly where those species occur. In the first two years of the survey the counts were organised by Harry Dott (Lothian) and Ray Murray (Borders) but since 1997 they have been organised by Mark Holling, via the Discussion Group. In the last few years there has been a Borders Discussion Group and Ray has been able to recruit new volunteers for the Borders coastline through that group.

The East Lothian section is characterised by a mixture of sandy and rocky stretches often with a large tidal range and an open outlook. There are cliffs only between North Berwick and Seacliff, at Dunbar and close to the regional boundary at Bilsdean. Much of the rest of the shoreline is backed by sand dunes. These factors mean that the counts feature few land birds as counters tend to walk in the middle of the beach or closer to the low tide line, and the upper shore and dunes are not readily visible.

In the Scottish Borders, almost the whole shore is rocky and backed by cliffs, and many parts of the beach cannot be safely walked, so observers have to make their way along the cliff top. Those who can walk on the beach are faced with jagged, sometimes vertical rocks, and few birds on the shore, in contrast to the Lothian counters.

Above Tyninghame - (St Baldred's Cradle looking north to St Baldred's Boat & Bass Rock) *Paul Speak*

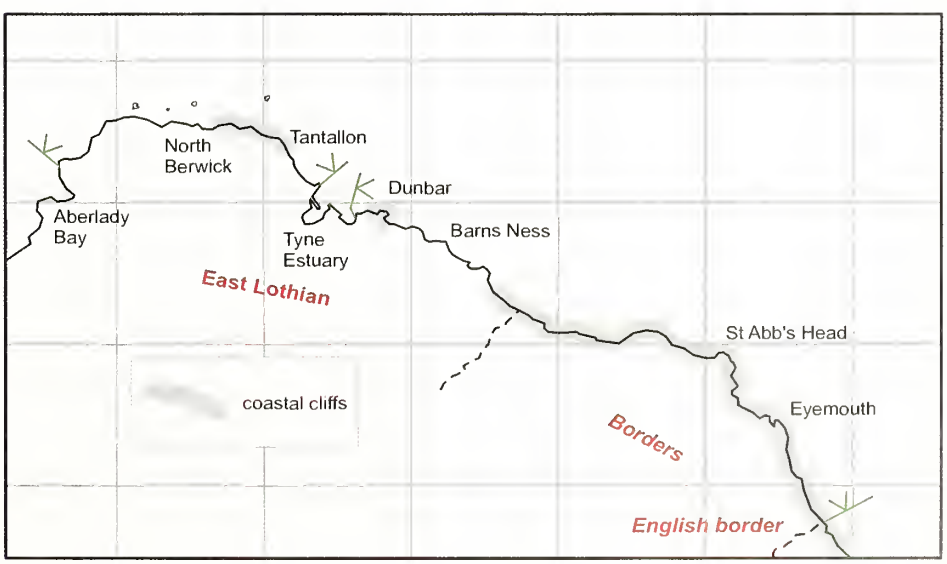


Table 1.

Species	Years	Mean	Max	Min
Mute Swan	6	2	7	1
Shelduck	12	13	37	3
Wigeon	12	508	1167	163
Teal	9	12	42	1
Mallard	12	171	407	57
Eider	12	2185	3322	1152
Long-t Duck	12	30	75	4
Common Scoter	12	347	1910	11
Velvet Scoter	6	13	55	7
Goldeneye	12	112	189	71
Red-b Merganser	12	30	47	18
Red-t Diver	11	12	32	3
Red-n Grebe	6	1	2	1
Slavonian Grebe	7	2	8	1
Fulmar	12	577	1633	4
Gannet	11	52	387	1
Cormorant	12	168	226	111
Shag	12	445	1076	198
Grey Heron	12	20	41	4
Buzzard	6	1	2	1
Kestrel	8	1	5	1
Peregrine	11	5	11	1
Oystercatcher	12	1159	1445	961
Ringed Plover	12	109	187	52
Golden Plover	12	445	1057	1
Grey Plover	12	51	91	28
Lapwing	11	151	607	1
Knot	12	442	908	143
Sanderling	6	5	30	1
Purple Sandpiper	12	74	100	36
Dunlin	12	437	1003	190
Bar-t Godwit	12	36	116	13
Eurasian Curlew	12	414	591	181
Redshank	12	413	623	279
Turnstone	12	341	522	228
Black-h Gull	12	566	1042	142
Common Gull	12	172	616	63
Herring Gull	12	3477	6817	1776
Great B-b Gull	12	127	204	75
Kittiwake	8	20	101	1
Guillemot	12	31	219	1
Razorbill	12	17	120	1
Feral/Rock Pigeon	11	377	622	173
Sky Lark	7	6	24	1
Meadow Pipit	11	16	38	2
Rock Pipit	12	115	167	52
Grey Wagtail	8	2	5	1
Pied Wagtail	9	12	49	1
Wren	10	18	43	8
Dunnock	8	3	8	1
Robin	10	6	16	1
Stonechat	6	3	16	1
Blackbird	10	5	11	1
Song Thrush	7	3	16	1
Jackdaw	10	68	259	22
Carrion Crow	11	179	343	11
Raven	9	4	14	1
Starling	11	89	276	25
House Sparrow	6	8	41	1
Linnet	11	109	501	9
TOTALS	12	14290	20954	10212

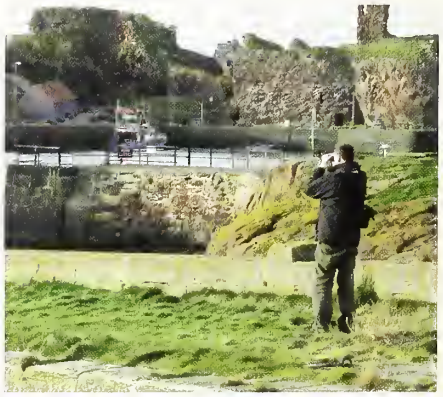
Results

Full results have been compiled for the first 12 years of the survey, covering 1995-2006. The species that were seen in at least six of the 12 years are listed in the table below along with the mean, minimum and maximum numbers observed over the 12-year period. Note that only waterfowl, waders, gulls and Rock Pipit were counted in 1995 and 1996. Unsurprisingly, the coastal birdlife is mainly characterised by gulls, ducks and waders. Their distribution relates closely to the different coastal habitats, mirroring their expected preferences, but the totals and variation in numbers were previously unknown.

Herring Gull was the most abundant species, being well distributed along the coast although particularly so in the Borders (mean total 3477). Counting Herring Gulls could be tricky because in some years many birds were constantly moving along the coast making it difficult to avoid double counting. Black-headed Gull was more common on the sandier Lothian coast than in the Borders and tended to be less evenly distributed. Common Gull was usually thinly spread through the Lothian coast but rare or absent in the Borders; numbers were very variable between years. Great Black-backed Gull was usually found in small numbers throughout the coast. In January, Kittiwakes are normally well out to sea but nevertheless were recorded in eight years with 101 in 1995.

Of the ducks, Eider was the most abundant, with over 3000 in one year, and was quite evenly distributed. Eider tended to occur in groups of up to 20 birds and although the groups were normally stationary, individuals could spend a lot of time under water so the counts may be slight underestimates. Wigeon was easily the second most abundant duck but was restricted to the central part of the coast between St Baldred's Boat in Lothian and Redheugh in Borders. Mallard had a similar spread to Wigeon but was much less common especially in the Borders. In most years Goldeneye was thinly distributed throughout the coast, with one or two 'good' years when numbers doubled. Of the four species of 'winter sea ducks' Common Scoter, Velvet Scoter, Long-tailed Duck and Red-breasted Merganser, only the last-named was found in most parts of the coast, albeit always in small numbers. The westernmost section of the Lothian coast between Gullane and Black Rocks was the only location where large numbers of either scoter or Long-tailed Duck were found. Velvet Scoter was the only member of this group that was completely absent in some years; most flocks of this species occur higher up the Forth. Teal was at best a rare duck and absent in some years. Shelduck was present in most years albeit in small numbers in few locations

Oystercatcher, the most abundant wader (mean 1159), was widely distributed though commoner in Lothian than in Borders. Golden Plover was restricted to parts of the Lothian coast and in some years was quite scarce. Knot was similarly restricted but was more consistent between years. Dunlin was found throughout the Lothian section but absent in the Borders. Curlew, Redshank and Turnstone had similar distributions, being more abundant in Lothian, and usually being sparse between Pease bay and Coldingham Bay in the Borders; nevertheless overall numbers were fairly consistent between years. Purple



Ian Andrews at Dunbar harbour

Sandpiper was consistently present in modest numbers on the Lothian coast but was rare in the Borders (maximum of 100 in 1997). Bar-tailed Godwit was similarly distributed but in very small numbers.

Apart from gulls, ducks and waders, there were of course many other interesting species. Fulmar was abundant in some years although in others it was almost absent – birds occasionally visit nesting cliffs in winter and the count depended on the timing of the survey and of these visits by Fulmars. In Lothian the species was largely restricted to the section between North Berwick and St Baldred's Boat, whereas it was more widely but more thinly distributed in the Borders. Shag was more numerous than Cormorant, but more variable from year to year. Both were well distributed with Shag being particularly prevalent in the southern half of the Borders. A handful of Red-throated Divers was seen almost every year, more often in Lothian than Borders. Red-necked and Slavonian Grebes were very rare. As the Gannet breeding colony of the Bass Rock is near the western end of the Lothian section, it was not surprising that Gannet was seen offshore at some point, but the number and location of passing birds was very unpredictable. A few Grey Heron were present every year, though not in every section of the coast. After 2000, Mute Swan was fairly regularly seen in the southern parts of the Borders coast. Guillemot and Razorbill were generally rare and unpredictable. Substantial numbers of Rock/Feral Pigeon find the coastal cliffs to their liking, particularly in the Borders.

Of the passerines, only Rock Pipit can be said to be dependent on the coast. It is widely distributed, albeit in small numbers, but a mean total of 115 compares with the estimated breeding population of 295-325 pairs in the SE Scotland Breeding Atlas (1988-1994). Perhaps there is a partial migration away from the breeding sites in the winter. Most of the other passerines were in low numbers and were found in coastal scrub (e.g. Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Blackbird, Song Thrush), farmland (Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Linnet, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow, Starling) and village garden (House Sparrow) habitats. Stonechat is a more characteristic over-wintering species, taking advantage of the relative mildness of the coastal climate. Absent before 2000, they have been annual since 2004 with 16 in that year.

Discussion

The range of species and the annual counts are very interesting and reveal new data. However, looking at trends over the 12-year period is less enlightening. For each species the annual variability has been expressed by the annual range as a percentage of the mean annual count. In these terms, the least variable species was Oystercatcher (42%), followed by Cormorant (69%). The only other abundant species with variability less than 100% were Purple Sandpiper, Turnstone, Curlew and Eider. Abundant species tended to have smaller variability than rarer species. Exceptions to this included Fulmar (282%), Golden Plover (237%), Mallard (205%), Wigeon (198%) and Shag (197%). Common Scoter was particularly variable (547%) having had two exceptionally high counts. Lapwing (401%) showed high variability because its numbers declined dramatically after the first four years. The most variable species were those that were generally infrequent but had one or more high counts, such as Gannet (745%), Guillemot (711%) and Razorbill (700%).

Coast at Dunbar *Ian Andrews*

Annual variability was generally so great that trends of abundance over the 12-year period were hard to find. Even the most abundant species, Eider, showed no trend when the whole period was taken into account. Lapwing was more abundant in the first four years than subsequently, but this might reflect a change of wintering strategy rather than a true decline: some years, more are on the beach, but usually

Ian Poxton counting near Dunglass with Torness behind *Ray Murray*

The beach at Lamberton *Graham Pyatt*

the flocks are a little inland. Golden Plover shows some sign of this kind of change. Perhaps the most striking conclusion that could be drawn was that there were virtually no trends in numbers of the characteristic coastal species. This will be explored further in the *Scottish Birds* article.

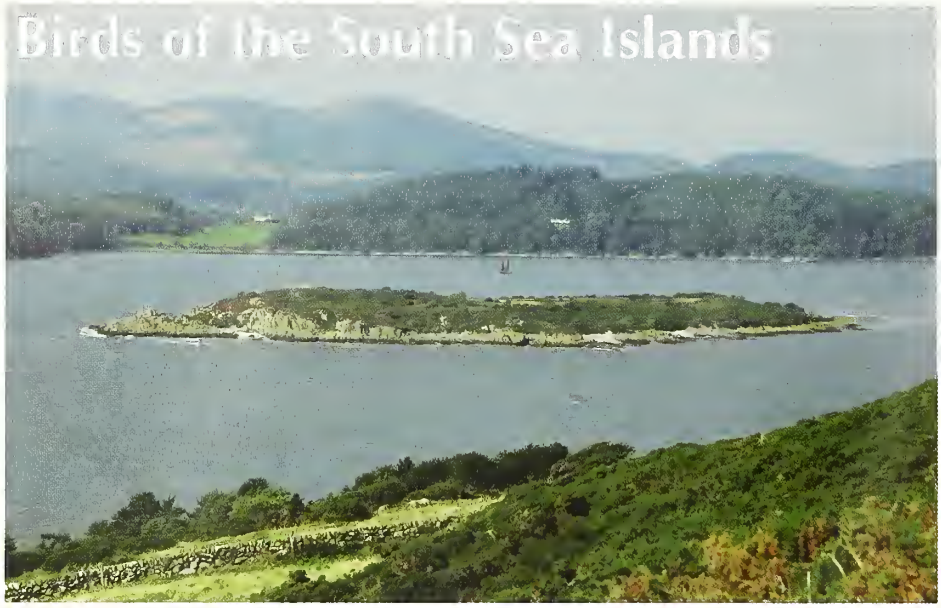
There is great enthusiasm each year for the counts to continue and it is a rewarding activity that could only have been organised through the facilities of the SOC. We would strongly suggest that other areas of Scotland look to doing a similar kind of co-ordinated project.

Mark Holling & Graham Pyatt

Names of counters 1995-2007:

Steve Anderson, Ian Andrews, John Ballantyne, Andrew Barker, Jim Burns, Neville Crowther, Stan da Prato, Harry Dott, Richard Eagles, Fran Evans, Andy Fitchett, Mike & Liz Fraser, Peter Gordon, David Graham, Mervyn & Brenda Griffin, Alan Heavisides, Mark Holling, Stephen Hunter, Malcolm Lindsay, Jim Mattocks, Jon Mercer, Ray Murray, Elaine Ogston, Mike Osborne, John Palfery, David Parkinson, Ian Poxton, Graham & Ros Pyatt, Tristan Reid, Kevin Rideout, Neil Ruttledge, Andrew Sandeman, Maggie Sheddan, Reuben Singleton, Bob & Betty Smith, Paul Speak, Tessa Thomas-Pyne, Ian Thomson, Peter Vandome and Joan Wilcox.

Birds of the South Sea Islands



High tide view in Rough Firth, over Rough Island, to the hills of Screel and Bengairn *R&B Mearns*

Yes, the Galloway coast has islands too. They are nearly always omitted from books about the Scottish islands and none of them have been featured in the recent BBC2 Coast programmes. Moreover, we rather suspect that none of them were mentioned at the 2006 SOC conference that concentrated on the birds of Scottish islands. OK, there are not very many islands. Some of them are only islands at high tide. Nobody permanently lives on them anymore. One island is really just a group of rocks without a scrap of vegetation. Yet each of them offers plenty of interest for those in search of birds and, as ever, you never know what you might see.

Although there are less than a dozen Galloway islands we know very few people who have visited them all. Access on foot at low tide has to be carefully timed and for those islands further offshore, it can be difficult to land. A quick round up will let you know what to expect should you manage a visit.

Rough Island, near Rockcliffe, is owned and managed by the National Trust for Scotland. It is one of the easiest tidal islands to visit as it is only a few hundred metres offshore and there are relatively long periods when access is possible. Although rocky at the south end there is an easy and well maintained path to the summit from which there are good views of Rough Firth. Although it was grazed by sheep until the 1970s it is now covered in rank vegetation and some scrub that favours Whitethroats, Willow Warblers, Chaffinches and Linnets. The shingle beaches around the island are cleared of vegetation from time to time to encourage Ringed Plovers and Oystercatchers to nest and in a rather vain attempt to attract breeding terns back to the island. In the 1950s and 60s, several hundred Common Terns bred alongside a few Arctic and Sandwich Terns; even the occasional Roseate Tern was seen prospecting. Those days seem to be long gone. The National Trust for Scotland discourages access during the breeding season but at other times leads guided walks.

Hawthorn scrub on Rough Island, looking up the Firth towards Kippford *D&G Council*

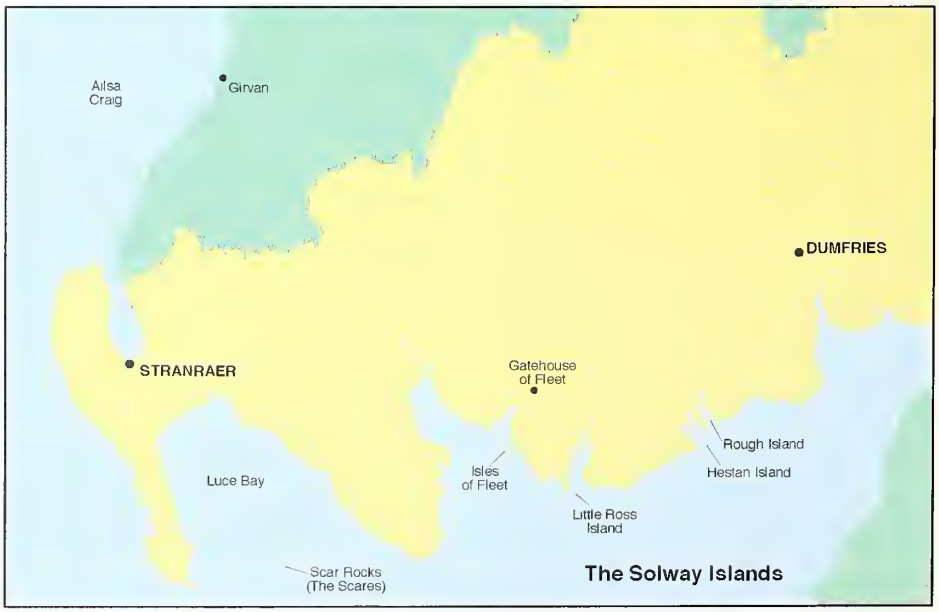
Hestan Island is privately owned and is more difficult to reach on foot, access being complicated by the Orchardton Burn that sometimes has to be crossed (depending on the course it chooses across the mud). On

Rough Island and Hestan Island beyond, with the Almorness peninsula jutting out between *D&G Council*

favourable tides there are a couple of hours on which to walk around. There is much less scrub here as the island is still grazed by sheep. In the past the main gull colony was nearly always on Almorness Point, the nearest part of the mainland, but in recent years the birds have used both the island and the headland. Recent counts for the island are - 170 pairs of Lesser Black Backed Gulls and 1000 pairs of Herring Gulls, while Almorness has had up to 1500 pairs of Lesser Black-backed Gulls and 650 pairs of Herring Gulls. Since 2005, many of the Cormorants from nearby Balcary Heughs have transferred to Hestan where the nests are more accessible and the young have been ringed by the North Solway Ringing Group.

Little Ross Island in Kirkcudbright Bay can only be visited by boat. The lighthouse was built by Thomas Stevenson in the 1840s and gained some notoriety in the 1950s when one of the keepers was murdered by a colleague. These days there is just a single part-time resident, unconnected with the lighthouse service.

The island is often mentioned by Baxter and Rintoul in *The Birds of Scotland* (1953) because they kept in close contact with the keepers who sent records to them, either strange birds that they had seen or others



that had crashed into the light. Several such casualties are now specimens at the Royal Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. Donald Watson visited the island in 1956 and the keepers afterwards sent him an array of dead Fieldfares, Redwings, Song Thrushes, Grasshopper Warblers, Willow Warblers, Garden Warblers, Sedge Warblers, Goldcrests and Starlings that had died there on migration. One day the keeper spent more than an hour leafing through his old bird books trying to identify a bird that got into the storeroom – it turned out to be a Water Rail.

Few passerines breed on the island except Rock and Meadow Pipits and the occasional Sky Lark and Swallow. Although there are some rugged cliffs at the south end, auks have never bred (with the possible exception of Black Guillemots). The most numerous seabirds are the gulls, with peak counts in the past 20 years of 100 Lesser Black Backed Gulls, 500 Herring Gulls and just a few Great Black-backed Gulls. Common Gulls are also regular breeders (up to about 30 pairs). Cormorants nest here or on the higher and steeper cliffs of the mainland at Meikle Ross, just a few hundred metres away.

Little Ross Island from the headland of Meikle Ross
D&G Council

The Fleet Islands are a small group of tidal islands tucked into Fleet Bay. **Barlocco Isle** was little known locally, and unheard of further afield, until 2004 when a 60ft Fin Whale was washed up and attracted hundreds of sightseers. It is a low flat island with some wind-stunted blackthorn and one or two wet areas that once held Moorhen and Redshank. Common Gulls have bred but not in recent years. To the west lies **Ardwall Isle**, much larger, and with an excellent mix of habitats that attracts more species than any of the other Galloway islands. The old Scots and Corsican Pine plantation is now a nest site for Buzzard and Kestrel, there are a few Ringed Plovers and Oystercatchers around the periphery, but most of the birds are passerines, including Blue Tits, Bullfinches, Whitethroats, Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs. The scrub at the north end is very dense and in May at least two Lesser Whitethroats can be heard singing away – though there is no real need to cross over to the island to hear these birds as the mainland opposite has many more pairs. **The Murray's Isles** (owned by the National Trust for Scotland) are two islets that lie close together, much further offshore than the others, so far out that even on the best tides in favourable weather there is little time on the islands before the sea returns. Once again, access is discouraged during the breeding season because of the numbers of nesting gulls. In 2004 there were 325 Lesser Black-backed Gulls, 850 Herring Gulls and 30 or more pairs of Great Black-backed Gulls. For the latter, this is the largest concentration in Galloway. In the past few years Cormorant numbers have increased, probably drawn from the west side of Wigtown Bay or Luce Bay where other colonies have declined. Nothing much else breeds here except a few Rock Pipits and the occasional Red-breasted Merganser and perhaps Common Eider. Elsewhere in the bay are some small rocky islets where a few Common and Arctic Terns nested until fairly recently.

The Scares lie approximately midway between Burrow Head and the Mull of Galloway and are now an RSPB reserve. Little Scare is too low lying for breeding seabirds but Big Scare has one of the best seabird colonies in Galloway, although the variety and number of species is decreasing as the Gannets have now taken over. Gannets were first recorded here in 1883 but it was not until 1939 that breeding was confirmed. In 2004 an aerial survey of the Gannet colony indicated that there were 2394 apparently occupied nest sites, just over 1% of the Scottish population, a 22% increase since a similar survey in 1995 (Murray, S., Wanless, S., and Harris, M.P. 2006. The status of the Northern Gannet in Scotland in 2003-04. *Scottish Birds* 26: 17-29.)

Over the years the gannetry has attracted an array of well known ornithologists including the Rev McWilliam, Sir Arthur Duncan and Donald Watson (all founder members of the SOC). On one of their visits to the Scares, McWilliam and Duncan were machine-gunned by a passing plane, though whether it was friendly fire or a passing German does not seem to have been recorded (perhaps their identification skills did not extend to flying machines). One of the Cormorants ringed by Lord David Stuart in 1939 was killed in an air-raid at Leith later the same year. The rocks have been visited by the Rev Francis Jourdain, the celebrated oologist and co-author (with F.B. Kirkman) of *British Birds* (1932). Gavin Maxwell, brought up at Elrig in Wigtownshire, is known to have been out there too. But it is the members of the North Solway Ringing Group such as John Young, John and Derek Skilling, Ken Bruce, Brian Turner, Mike Carrier, the late Jim Young and the late Jim Barclay, who have been out to the Scares most often, attempting to land each year since the 1960s to ring Gannets, Shags and Guillemots. Kittiwakes still nest on the steepest faces, but Cormorants have now gone and because there is no earth and few loose rocks, the Scares are not really suitable for Puffins or Black Guillemots, though breeding is reported occasionally. Small flocks of Purple Sandpipers have been recorded during several of the July ringing trips. It would be interesting to know how many spend the winter on the Scares but, as far as we know, no one has ever been to look.

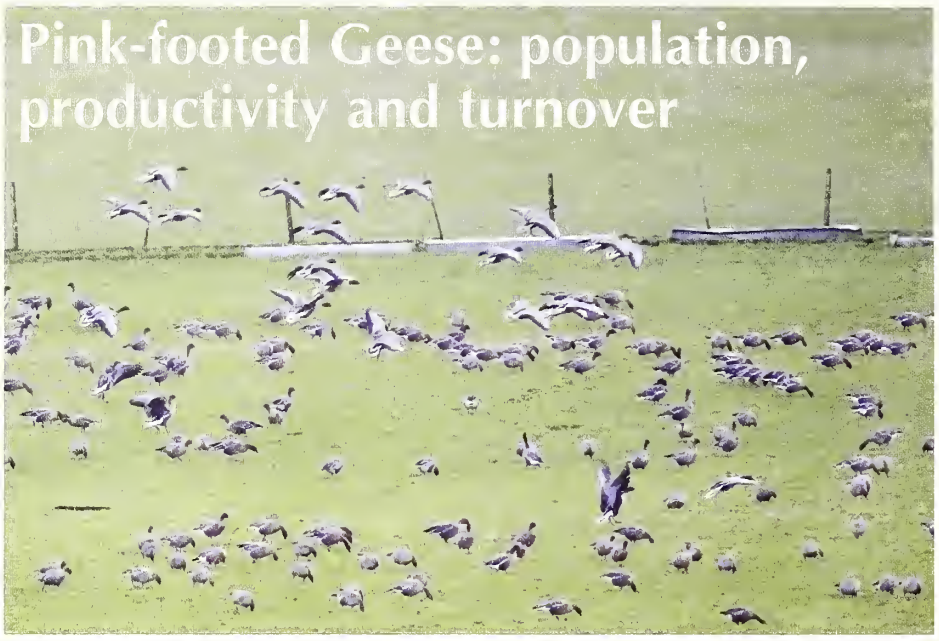
A North Solway Ringing Group visit to the Scares, July 2002. Colin Watret (with protective gear), Ken Bruce (centre) and John Young *Keith Kirk*

There are only two other Galloway 'islands': Genoch Rocks off the northwest coast of the Rhins, just a stone's throw offshore, where Grey Seals haul out and a few terns and Eiders breed. And lastly, **The Wig** near Kirkcolm, a shingle spit that leads out to a slightly raised mass of shingle in Loch Ryan. A few plants grow but it is unstable and has decreased in size due to wave action produced by the high-speed ferries that sail to Northern Island. It may be a sorry apology for an island, but more terns nest here now than anywhere else in Galloway. In 2004 there were 45 pairs of Sandwich Terns as well as Common Terns and Arctic Terns (together about 20 pairs). In the 1990s there were up to nine pairs of Little Terns but numbers have dwindled and there seems to have been no recent breeding. One has to hope that they have not gone forever, as the shallow waters of the loch seem ideal feeding grounds for them.

A more detailed paper summarising all the known records of breeding birds on the Solway islands is scheduled to appear in the *Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society* in 2007.

Richard & Barbara Mearns

Pink-footed Geese: population, productivity and turnover



Pink-feet coming in to feed *David Palmar*

The Pink-footed Goose is thriving! With a total of 268,750 in the latest available national census (autumn 2005), Pinkfeet are by far the most numerous geese in Britain. Numbers increased steadily from 29,600 when regular counting started in 1950, to around 100,000 in the early 1980s (Figure 1 below), following increased protection, such as prohibition of the sale of dead wild geese. During the 1980s, however, the rate of population increase accelerated dramatically, doubling the population within a decade. The tenfold increase from 1950 to the peak of 292,150 in 2004 is a remarkable achievement for any bird population! The reason for this change in the Pinkfoot's fortunes is not clear and may involve a number of factors, such as climate change, colonisation of new breeding areas in Iceland and Greenland and improved feeding conditions in Scotland prior to the spring migration. In addition, it is unlikely that shooting mortality will have kept up with the greatly increased numbers of geese, so that the proportion being shot each year will have decreased as the population grew.

Associated with the increase in the Pinkfoot population is continuing good production of young. Although this declined during the early years of population growth, up to a total of around 100,000, it has remained fairly steady since then (Figure 2), with no sign of a decrease over the last 20 years. This is surprising, since the productivity of a bird population would be expected to drop as numbers increase, through competition for nesting areas, depletion of food supplies in the breeding grounds, etc, and suggests that the Pinkfoot population is not currently under such population pressures.

The production of young is assessed by two measurements; the percentage of juveniles (Figure 2) and the average brood size in the autumn population, soon after the birds' arrival in Britain in mid to late September. These are assessed by staff from the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust (WWT), helped by a small group of volunteers, including the author. Juvenile Pinkfeet can be distinguished from adults, even at a distance, by the absence of white-edged feathers along the upper margin of the flanks, which create a conspicuous horizontal white line in the adult. Juveniles also have evenly mottled flanks and bellies, compared to the adults' striped flanks (which often have progressive darkening towards the rear). These distinguishing characters gradually disappear over the autumn as the juveniles undergo a body moult. Measurements made by the author at the Loch of Strathbeg, Aberdeenshire showed that by mid November, 29% of juveniles had some white-edged flank feathers and 25% had adult-type feathers on at least a quarter of their flank area. However, these partially moulted juveniles can still be distinguished readily from adults, which allows reliable measurements to be made until mid November.

The percentage of juveniles is assessed by counting the number of both age groups in Pinkfoot flocks, taking care to sample from all parts of each flock, avoiding concentrating on the edges, where the proportion of juveniles tends to be highest. Families can be identified as pairs with one or more juveniles closely attached to them, forming a discrete group. The picture below shows, in the centre foreground, a typical family with a brood of two at the Loch of Strathbeg's Tower Pool. The nearest juvenile is helpfully pointing out that it has no white edge on its flank! Behind it in a line are the two adults with the other juvenile between them, with the white lines on the adults' flanks showing clearly.

A Pink-foot family (in centre foreground), at the Tower Pool, Loch of Strathbeg *Ian Patterson*

Figure 1.

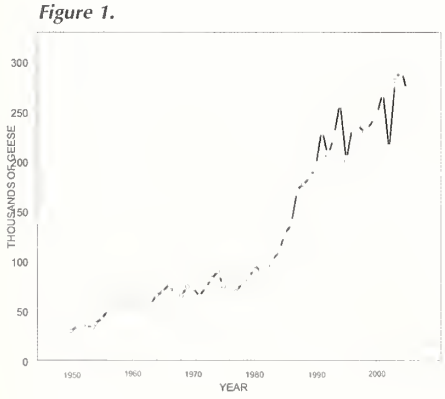


Figure 2.

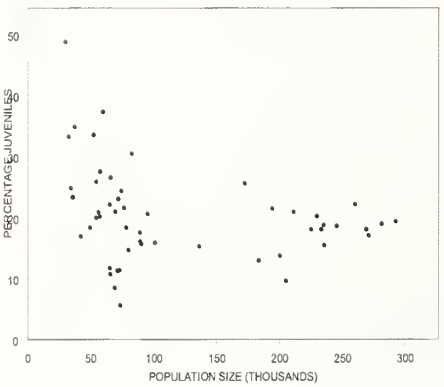
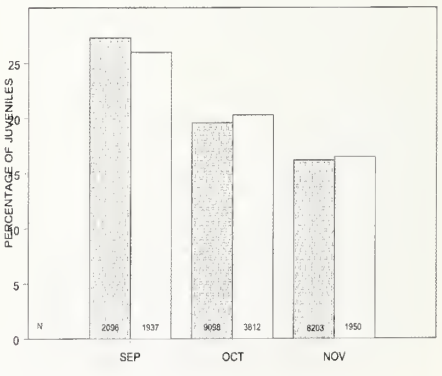


Figure 3.



An important question in the measurement of productivity in goose populations is; when is the best time to make the assessments, immediately after arrival or later in the autumn? Measurements by the author at the Loch of Strathbeg showed that both the percentage of juveniles and average brood size declined from September to November, and analysis of national data held by WWT confirmed that this trend was general (Figure 3). The reason for this decline is not clear. One possibility is that the seasonal decline could be caused by shooting mortality, since juveniles are known to be more vulnerable than adults, with their proportion in shooting bags typically at least twice that in the population at the same time. However, calculations by the author suggest that only about a quarter of the decrease in the percentage of juveniles can be accounted for by shooting.

Another possibility is that different components of the Pinkfoot population, with different levels of productivity, might arrive in Britain at different times, with later arrivals having fewer young. There is some evidence that this might happen, since measurements by the author of the proportion of geese wearing neck collars at the Loch of Strathbeg in autumn 2000 showed a marked seasonal decrease, with the number of collars per thousand geese declining by early November to only half of the number found a month earlier. Since most neck collars have been attached to Pinkfeet while flightless in their breeding areas in Iceland, it is likely that birds which spent the summer there would be more likely to have collars than birds which summered elsewhere, (including Greenland and other parts of Iceland). It is possible therefore that the seasonal decrease in the percentage of juveniles and in average brood size might be due to the later arrival of less productive birds which had summered in areas other than the main breeding grounds in Iceland. Sadly, there is no information on the arrival times or productivity of such birds, so this idea cannot be tested at present.

An implication of the above ideas is that there must be considerable turnover of individual Pinkfeet at sites such as Strathbeg. Observation by the author of neck-collared birds roosting at the loch suggest strongly that this is the case. If there was no turnover, the proportion of "new" collars (those seen for the first time in a given autumn), should decline towards zero after a few weeks, given the calculated 62% chance of detecting a given individual during its stay at Strathbeg. However, the percentage of "new" collars declined only slowly and remained at over 40% of the collars seen each week, even after nine weeks' observation. This suggests that new individuals were constantly arriving in the area, while others were leaving. This was confirmed by the sighting in other parts of Britain of 36% of the birds seen at Strathbeg, either before they were seen there or (more commonly) afterwards. Most collared individuals were seen at Strathbeg in only one week of the autumn and few were seen for more than two weeks.

Using the sightings of neck collars, it was possible to make a crude calculation of the total number of different individual Pinkfeet which passed through the Strathbeg area in the course of the autumn. The resulting estimates were 102,000 birds in 2000 and 112,900 in 2001. The two values are reasonably consistent and suggest that well over one third of the total population passes through the area in autumn.

The overall picture that emerges from these studies is of a highly mobile species, constantly moving around the country, with different components of the population arriving at different times during the autumn. The implications for the measurement of productivity is that sampling should be spread evenly over the whole autumn, from mid September to mid November, or alternatively should be concentrated in October. This would compromise between the opposing trends of different arrival dates of different components of the population on the one hand and differential shooting mortality on the other.

Ian Patterson, 27 Monymusk Terrace, Aberdeen AB15 8NX. nhi013@abdn.ac.uk

More detail can be obtained from the following publications:

Patterson, I J and Hearn, R D. 2006. Month to month changes in age ratio and brood size in Pink-footed Geese *Anser brachyrhynchus* in autumn . Ardea 94: 175-183.

Patterson, I J and Hearn, R D. 2006. Turnover of individuals in a local population of Pink-footed Geese *Anser brachyrhynchus*. Wildfowl 56: 52-64.

A Pink-foot with a neck collar *Chris Batty*

NOTES & COMMENT

Black-throated Divers

Wildlife photographer Frank Stark from Lewis is one of our main contributors to Notes and Comment. Here he shares some experiences with us and photos of his local Black-throated Divers.

Throughout the winter months in Lewis I have wandered regularly along the shores of Loch Leurbost, a sea loch conveniently close to my home, in search of the elusive Black- throated Diver. They often remain hidden, but with perseverance, the determined watcher can be rewarded with a view of one, perhaps several of these graceful birds.

Solitary individuals are not uncommon but divers tend to prefer company, usually of their own kind. I did see a solitary Red-throated Diver with a group of five Black-throats on one occasion, but as a rule the species tend to remain separate, with the Black-throated in larger numbers.

Both species have similar calls and they communicate by wailing or by uttering a short series of croaks. I describe the call as a croak as it is deeper and more guttural than the quack of most ducks and is heard in a rapid staccato fashion when the birds are in flight.

Black-throated group *Frank Stark*

About mid-April, as the temperature begins to rise, the divers leave the sea and return to their traditional breeding territories. The flight paths are uncannily similar every year as one bird of each pair travels regularly from fresh water to ocean to feed, and back, daily throughout the summer months. They are most at home in the water and always noticeably awkward on land.

For seven years I have observed a pair of Black-throated Divers attempt to breed in the same remote area of moorland. They use many lochs in the vicinity during April and early May but inevitably choose one particular favourite. After rearing a chick successfully in 2003, they moved to a neighbouring loch in the following year.

They failed to breed there in 2004, returned to their old haunt in 2005, failed again, and were unsuccessful on the same loch in 2006.

Black-throated Divers *Frank Stark*

Although I have no concrete evidence concerning these breeding failures, I need only list the predators that share the divers' territory and it is clear how the odds are increasingly stacked against them. On one side of the loch is a large Herring Gull colony fringed by a few pairs of Great Black-backed Gulls and some Common Gulls. Given the opportunity, the gulls will steal unguarded divers' eggs and small chicks, although they themselves are also at risk from even deadlier predators. A pair of Golden Eagles hunt regularly over the colonies during the breeding season, killing youngsters and adults alike.

I have found Otter and Mink tracks, as well as temporary dens, on the shore between the gull colonies and the loch where the divers usually lay. Great Skuas have become a more recent threat. The first pair, possibly attracted by the gulls, arrived in 2005; another pair joined them in 2006. The Bonxies look set to become as regular as the ubiquitous Ravens and Crows that have probably been in the area as long as the Divers. Human interference is minimal, mainly due to the remote location, but last year an angler appeared at the loch, inadvertently forcing the incubating female to leave her eggs for a while.

Sunset on the loch *Frank Stark*

Black-throated Divers often live for over twenty years and therefore do not have to breed successfully every year for the species to survive. Apart from the American Mink, which according to local reports will be eradicated shortly, their predators are natural ones, each with its own important part to play in the food chain. Ever the optimist, I look forward to watching the first Black-throated Diver chick this coming summer, after four barren years. With any luck I may be around when it embarks on its maiden flight, following its parents as they encourage it away from the old breeding ground and along the familiar route towards the relative safety of the sea.

Frank Stark

Eagle Conservation Alliance

SOC member Mike McGrady writes to us about an important concerted action to conserve eagles worldwide.

Thirty-two specialists from 10 countries on four continents met in Oropesa, Spain (24-28 October 2006) to discuss the alarming worldwide situation for eagles. Of the 74 currently recognized eagle species, 32 (43.2%) are listed as Vulnerable, Endangered or Critically Endangered by the IUCN-World Conservation Union (2006 Red List). Eagles play an important role in the balance and functioning of ecosystems and are sentinels for environmental change. People's interest in eagles also reflects the wonders of nature, freedom and, in some cultures, spirituality. The meeting combined brief scientific presentations and working groups to identify what is known as well as new means to enhance eagle conservation.

As the workshop discussions proceeded, it was realized that there was value in forming a consortium of like-minded eagle specialists who would integrate their knowledge, scientific expertise and other resources to benefit wild and captive eagles. The participants formed the 'Eagle Conservation Alliance' (ECA), with a mission of 'acting to conserve eagles worldwide'. The ECA's mission will be met by: enhancing the management of existing populations; recovering and, when appropriate, reintroducing eagles to nature; conducting basic and applied research; providing advice and technical support; developing and distributing

education materials; communicating and sharing news; fundraising for priority initiatives; and building capacity (training) in science and eagle management. Working groups on communication, research and husbandry/management identified priority activities to be initiated in the coming year. Species that will benefit include Serpent and Hawk eagles, the Spanish Imperial eagle and the Philippine eagle, among others.

The workshop (organized by Drs. Juan Manuel Blanco and Ursula Hofle) was co-sponsored by the Aquila Foundation/Center for Studies of Iberian Raptors, SeaWorld/Busch Gardens-Conservation Fund, Zoological Society of San Diego, Schubot Exotic Bird Health Center, Fort Worth Zoo, Los Angeles Zoo and the Smithsonian's National Zoological Park.

The Second Annual ECA Workshop will take place in September 2007 at Africam Safari, Puebla, Mexico. Individuals interested in more information on ECA should contact Juan Manuel Blanco (uhofleh@wanadoo.es), Frank Carlos Camacho (fcamacho@africamsafari.com.mx)or David Rimlinger (Drimlinger@sandiegozoo.org

Mike J. McGrady
Natural Research, Ltd, Am Rosenhuegel, 59 A-3500, Krems, Austria

More Echoes from the 1966 Cruise (article in *SBN* 82)

Adam Watson contacted us to say that in the *SBN* article on the Cruise, the bottom left picture (on page10) shows Ian Pennie as the man to the right of Willie Brotherston.

Dougal Andrew has written to correct some details in the report of Chris Waltho's (Cruise)speech at the SOC Conference. With reference to the Cruise he says, "George Waterston was – inevitably – the power horse behind the organisation of the Cruise, but he was not the 'chef de tour': that post was filled by Dr. Joe Eggeling – the then SOC President – whose total involvement in the project was of no less value".

And commenting on the statement... 'and to Orkney where on Copinsay, a memorial to James Fisher was visited'... "Copinsay was not visited, and it would have been premature at that time to have erected a memorial to James Fisher, as it was not until 1970 that he was killed in a motor accident. Indeed that Great Man was a very lively participant in the Cruise"

Bill Bourne has kindly sent the following photo (right) which he took on the Cruise, showing James Fisher (on left) chatting with three other delegates on deck.

Humming-birds *John Watson*

Caption Competition

Provide a caption for the bird picture above and have a chance of winning an SOC carved bird. Each *SBN* edition will feature a new photo. The winner and other best captions will be shown in *SBN* 84. Send your single caption by E-mail to jimmy.maxwell @virgin.net (or of course by mail to the SOC – see Page 3)

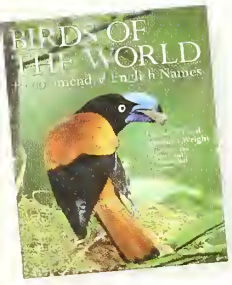
Fulmar *Frank Stark*

The winning Caption from *SBN* 82 (see photo above) came from Mike Thomas with – "OK my friend - just come one step closer...!" Well done!

When was the last time we saw a Kestrel?

Bill Bourne

BOOK REVIEWS



Birds of the World Recommended English Names, Frank Gill and Minturn Wright (on behalf of International Ornithological Congress) 2006. Christopher Helm, London. ISBN-13: 978-0-7136-7904-5 ISBN-10: 0-7136-7904-2 £19.99

This 260 page book is the result of a mammoth project to assign a single English name to all of the world's bird species. The International Ornithological Congress (IOC) is "the pre-eminent international forum of ornithologists, promoting world-wide collaboration and cooperation". The initiative began in 1990 with the intention of producing a set of unique English-language names which conformed to a set of rules formulated through a consensus of leading ornithologists worldwide. The 11 page Introduction describes how this was achieved, and the basis of those rules (considering spelling, hyphens, British vs. American spelling amongst other things). This section is really of interest to those with a real passion in such matters. The next 200 pages comprise the list – from Grey Tinamous *Tinamous tao* (of South America) to Orange-breasted Bunting *Passerina leclancherii* (of Middle America). The rest of the book is the huge 46 page index so that you can find the species by its international or scientific name.

And believe me, you need the index, because the order the species are presented in is not what we are used to. Not just wildfowl and gamebirds before the rest of the Western Palaearctic species, but other changes too, especially amongst the passerine families. This is because the sequence is based on Howard & Moore's Checklist of the Birds of the World, although it is acknowledged in the Introduction that current taxonomic work will further inform these decisions and that this book is really a work in progress, presenting the first step towards acceptable standardised names. The authors welcome ideas on how to proceed. Maybe we shouldn't get too hung up on the sequencing just yet.

There is also a CD supplied, which contains the lists in Excel format so that it can be easily copied and used in computer applications. Throughout the book, a code indicating the geographical region that the bird occurs in is given (e.g. EU for Europe, the Middle East and Asia north of the Himalayas), and more detail on distribution is included on the CD. This could be very useful for many of our members and one of the main reasons for getting your own copy of the book.

So, what of the names? Well, many of course are familiar and what we might expect. But some are not. For a few, you need to know the scientific name to know which species is being listed. Thus *Columba livia* (Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon) becomes the rather sensibly named Common Pigeon. The naming of scoters can only be described as confusing. Until recently *Melanitta nigra* was known as Common Scoter in Europe and Black Scoter in America – but they were the same species and the BOU recommended name became Black Scoter (which has not really caught on yet). Then the American form was separated, and BOU returned to Common and Black for the two (new) species. Now though IOC has named the American species American Scoter *Melanitta americana*, keeping Black Scoter for the one we are familiar with. However, Dunnock is back to being Dunnock and Little Plover is Little Ringed Plover once more – good news! With that and a few other exceptions, the "new" names promoted by BOU and officially adopted by SOC have largely been used here, so we are already getting used to those. Sadly, however, when there have been different conventions for the same species here and in America, it seems that the American names largely predominate. Divers are loons, *Uria* guillemots are murres. Arctic and Long-tailed Skuas become Parasitic and Long-tailed Jaegers (though the other skuas are still skuas). Rough-legged Buzzard (Europe)/Rough-legged Hawk (America) *Buteo lagopus* becomes just Roughleg though – I don't understand that one.

Everyone will find something to be unhappy about, but the point is that an authority has made a stab at standardising names and they are to be congratulated for having a go. The task has not been taken on lightly. It is easy for us in Scotland and Britain to be insular, but the majority of birds occur elsewhere in the world, and English is a widespread language, often the one adopted to allow different language speakers to be able to communicate with each other. World birders need a common name so they know what to expect when they go abroad. Many birds are under threat and without a single name, conservation efforts might be harmed. I know many readers will cry "but we have the scientific name" and yes we do, but most people, even most birdwatchers, do not use these names when they speak about birds. And speaking about birds is important for their conservation. Also, with ever more frequent taxonomic changes, scientific names change too. Other languages have their own names, but is it too much to ask that we English speakers could have a single name for each species?

Personally I do not agree with some of the names here, but I support the efforts and I hope that common sense will now come to the fore. Those names acceptable to the birdwatching community will come into common usage. Others will not, and a future edition of this list will, I hope, take this into account.

What next? The BOU will need to consider their response to these names, and maybe we will see some changes in the interests of standardisation, and future (sensible) changes to the IOC list. It has been suggested that in UK (scientific) publications we could possibly use a name in common usage with the BOU or IOC name in brackets alongside the scientific name. This will help acceptance of changes in the longer term.

So, should you buy this book? It is I believe an important publication, but unless you keep a World List and require some standardisation, I would suggest not. But go along to the Waterston Library and have a look at it. The sheer wealth of bird species, most of which I am sure you will never have heard of, is awe-inspiring and offers stimulation to use the rest of the library or the internet to go and find out more about some of them. That's what ornithology is really about!

I would like to thank Ron Forrester and Martin Collinson for their comments on bird-naming which helped me in compiling this review.

Mark Holling

RSPB Guide to Digital Wildlife Photography, David Tipling. 2006. RSPB. ISBN–10:071 367 1858 £19.99

This book is very informative. As David states in the Introduction, "my main purpose in writing this book has been to show how I go about taking and dealing with digital images".

In Contents, the headings and subheadings give the wide range covered, from getting started, through photographic theory, how digital cameras work , field techniques, use of computers, to 'the business of

Wildlife Photography' - marketing your own work. In fact the Contents work well as an index, the official index at the back is far from comprehensive.

He does mention compact digital cameras, but focuses on how to produce pictures of a professional standard using Digital Single Lens Reflex cameras.

This book contains many of his photographs to illustrate points made in the text, for example showing how different exposures give different effects. As a professional Wildlife Photographer he has travelled extensively, circling the world many times over; the pictures in this book were taken on all continents.

It is well written with little jargon, but there is the occasional lapse, e.g.'lenses come in lengths from 10 mm to 1,000 mm' - at first I imagined lenses 1 metre long! - but the term 'focal lengths' makes more sense.

I learned much from this book, but it's even worth buying for the photographs alone.

Harriet Trevelyan

A Complete Guide to Arctic Wildlife, Richard Sale, 2006.Christopher Helm, London, ISBN 0-7136-7039-8 (Hardback), 464 pages, £40.00

The first 50 or so pages are by way of an introduction. The author starts by defining the scope of the book. How do you define the Arctic? By the Arctic Circle? By the ice sheet? By temperature? By vegetation zones? He uses a combination of all these to arrive at a definition which includes the extreme north of Scandinavia, Iceland, Greenland, northern Canada, coastal Alaska, the Aleutian Islands, Kamchatka and coastal northern Russia. Chapters on geology, climate, human population, habitats, adaptations for Arctic life, speciation and biogeography, and threats to the Arctic complete a very useful introductory section.

The main body of the book is a field guide to the birds (238 pages) and mammals (114 pages) of the Arctic. The birds follow the traditional Voous sequence beginning with divers, with modifications to the end of 2005, rather than the new BOU sequence which starts with the swans. Traditional English names are also preferred (e.g. divers, not loons) with newer "alternative names" (e.g. Horned Grebe for Slavonian) in lighter type alongside. Of course in the Arctic, there are relatively few passerines but, curiously, the order finishes with finches following the buntings.

Each species account includes paragraphs on identification, confusion species, size, voice, distribution, diet, breeding, taxonomy and geographical variation. There is at least one photograph of each species, as well as paintings by such well-known artists as Hilary Burn, Alan Harris, Dave Nurney and Laurel Tucker. Distribution maps are clear and show areas of permanently, and seasonally, frozen sea, as well as the species range.

The mammals section follows the same format and ranges from shrews and rodents through bears to seals and cetaceans. Again, there are photographs as well as the plates, painted this time by Marc Dando. Other Arctic wildlife, such as fishes and invertebrates, are not covered – I suppose it might be useful to know what was biting you!

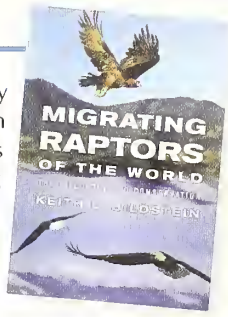
This is a comprehensive guide to the birds and mammals to be encountered in the Arctic. It is more than just a field guide, as can be seen by its size and weight (1.5 kg). If you're travelling light this might be a problem, especially with all that optical equipment, but it does replace several books (European, American and Asian bird and mammal books) so it's probably worth it. It certainly makes essential pre-trip reading, including the short "visitor's guide" section at the end – each region has "how to get there", "how to get around" and "what to see". It certainly tempts me, if further temptation were needed, to visit this wonderful, if shrinking, part of the world.

Paul Speak

Migrating Raptors of the world, their Ecology and Conservation, Keith L Bildstein, 2006. Cornell University Press, ISBN 13: 978-0-8014-4179-0 (Hardback). £19.95

This book is so full of fascinating information on raptor migration that it is difficult to highlight particular sections. Some facts however may emphasise its complex coverage.

For instance, 183 species of raptor, i.e.62% of all birds of prey, migrate, with the Amur Falcon which travels some 10,000 km on its journey from Russia and China to South Africa, making the longest water crossing. Also Sharp Shinned Hawks were thought to be dramatically down in number when counted at Autumn Migration checkpoints. However it was found that large numbers of the species were no longer moving south due to the huge increase of bird feeders which provided easy pickings, something akin to our Sparrow Hawks now frequenting suburban gardens.

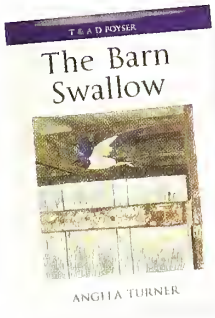


Twelve of the world's major raptor-watching sites in four continents are studied in detail along with migration life histories, flight strategies and raptor conservation. The author has brought together a massive amount of easily read facts and this makes the book an essential reference for those interested in migration, particularly regarding birds of prey.

Keith Macgregor

The Barn Swallow, Angela Turner, 2006. T.&.A.D. Poyser, ISBN 0-7136-6558-0 256pp (hardback) £40

The information in this book is based on scientific research, not only by the author herself (who studied the feeding behaviour of the Barn Swallow as part of her doctorate while at Stirling in the 1970s) but also by researchers in Europe, particularly Denmark, Germany and Spain and including the UK. Where possible, comparisons are made between European Barn Swallows and those of the North American race. The text is well written and detailed.



The book contains chapters on flight and feeding behaviour, the various aspects of breeding (the largest section of the book), migration and dispersal, population trends and factors affecting populations. There is an extensive Bibliography.

The outline of some of the research is predictable, viz the dependence on weather and food availability. The detail of how Barn Swallows deal with these problems is interesting as is the fact that females prefer males with long tail feathers and large white spots which indicate better health. The disadvantage is that in Europe these males tend to offer less assistance in nest- building, incubation and feeding the young. The Barn Swallow is not always the sweet little bird that its song suggests. A good educational read.

Joan Wilcox

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION LIBRARIES
3 9088 01324 9602

Scottish Bird News – it newsletter! RESPOND NOW!

Scottish Bird News exists to communicate with SOC members and disseminate information about Scotland's bird life. Above all, it is the magazine for SOC members, and one of the benefits of SOC membership.

As editors of ***SBN***, we strive to make the magazine interesting, varied and topical. We aim to balance content and style so that as many of our members as possible will find the articles relevant and enjoyable. We would therefore very much welcome any comments from members about ***SBN***, and the short questionnaire below aims to prompt feedback, either positive or critical. We promise that we will fully consider any comments made, and we hope to receive some useful suggestions for future newsletter items. Please respond – either by **sending this form** (included in your mailing), or **emailing this form** (available on the SOC website) to the SOC Office (addresses on this page).

Ian Francis and Jimmy Maxwell (co-editors)

Please comment on how **useful** or **interesting** you find the following main regular articles in *SBN*. Please circle: 1 = **Very (definitely include in *SBN*)**, 2 = **Quite**, 3 = **No strong view**, 4 = **Not very**, 5 = **not at all (consider dropping from *SBN*)**

Reserve Spotlights/features	1	2	3	4	5
Good birding areas	1	2	3	4	5
Local patch reports	1	2	3	4	5
Conference reports	1	2	3	4	5
Articles about history of Scottish ornithology	1	2	3	4	5
Bird behaviour notes/observations	1	2	3	4	5
Book/product reviews	1	2	3	4	5
Recent reports (bird sightings)	1	2	3	4	5
Articles about bird surveys	1	2	3	4	5
Articles on individual bird species	1	2	3	4	5
Articles about other wildlife (e.g. butterflies)	1	2	3	4	5
Articles about bird art/artists	1	2	3	4	5
Articles about bird conservation issues	1	2	3	4	5
Reports of SOC local group activities	1	2	3	4	5

Comments on any of the above:
Writing style: Are our articles too basic or too scientific? Any comments on style:

Photographs: Should there be more or fewer? Any comments on photos or illustrations:

Future articles, regular features or running series in *SBN*. Please provide any suggestions here:

If you would like to offer an article, photograph or any other contribution, please say here:
(the list of contribution titles above may be useful here)

General comments: If there are any other points you would like to make about *SBN* not covered above, please write them here. (You may have views on whether *SBN* should also be issued electronically on the SOC website to SOC members only?)

You may submit this questionnaire anonymously, but if you would like us to reply to your suggestions, please write your contact details here:

Thank you very much indeed for your views. We will take them fully into account when planning future issues of *SBN*.

ISBN 0268-3199

Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published four times a year in March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Editors at the address below no later than five weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

**The Scottish Ornithologists' Club,
The Scottish Birdwatching Resource Centre, Waterston House, Aberlady,
East Lothian EH32 0PY.
Tel: 01875 871330
Fax: 01875 871035
E-mail: mail@the-soc.org.uk**

The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) was established by a group of Scottish ornithologists who met together in the rooms of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in Edinburgh on 24th March 1936.

The Club now has 2200 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur birdwatchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all, the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

Headquarters provide central publications and an annual conference, and houses the Waterston Library, the most comprehensive library of bird literature in Scotland. The network of branches, which meet in Aberdeen, Ayr, the Borders, Dumfries, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, New Galloway, Orkney, St Andrews, Stirling, Stranraer and Thurso, organise field meetings, a winter programme of talks and social events.

The SOC also supports the Local Recorders' Network and the Scottish Birds Records Committee. The latter maintains the 'official' Scottish List on behalf of the Club. The Club supports research and survey work through its Research Grants.

The Club maintains a regularly-updated web site, which not only contains much information about the Club, but is also the key source of information about birds and birdwatching in Scotland. SOC is a registered Scottish charity (no SCO 009859).

www.the-soc.org.uk

***Passwords to access members' web pages on the new SOC web site:
'Little' & 'Plover'***